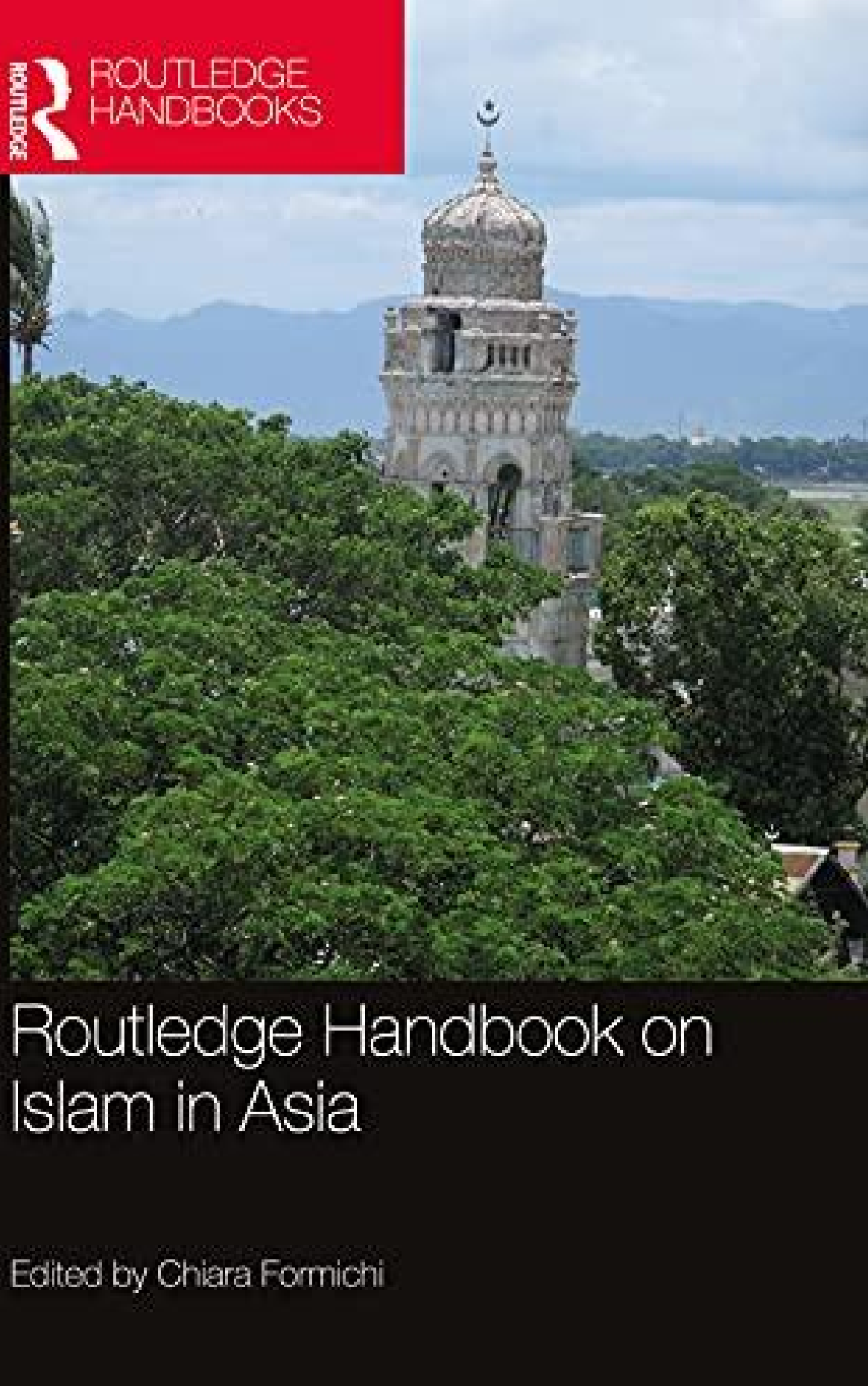
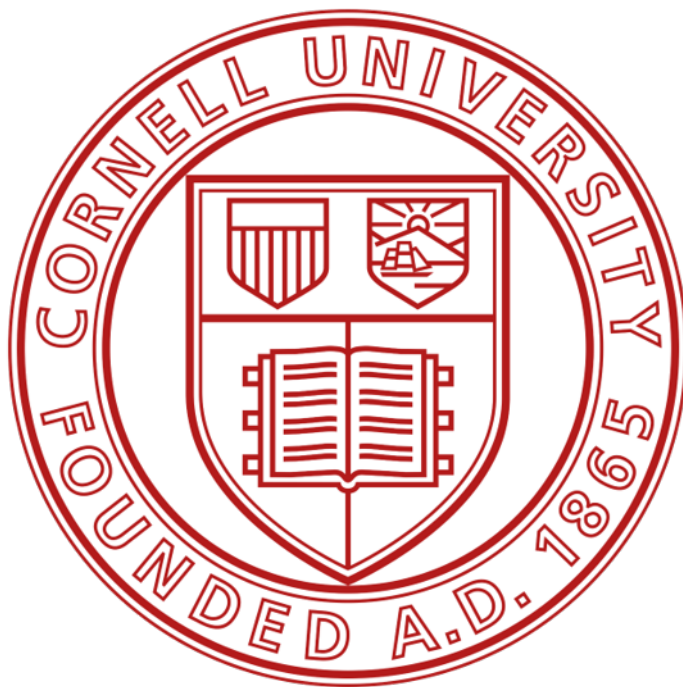




Routledge Handbook on
Islam in Asia

Edited by Chiara Formichi



Cornell University

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON ISLAM IN ASIA

Edited by Chiara Formichi

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Ultimately, my foremost gratitude goes to those who did most of the work necessary to get the volume “done” amidst the turmoil of 2020–2021, which layered itself on, and exacerbated, the already challenging ebbs and flows of (academic) life. On the one hand is the extended family which cared for my daughter while I spent time thinking, writing, conversing, and putting the volume together. On the other hand are the contributors who have been able to stay committed to the project.

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PART I

Frames



1

STUDYING ISLAM

The view from Asia

Chiara Formichi

Walking around a predominantly Muslim neighborhood in Turfan, Xinjiang, I found myself surprised at the sight of a truck advertising a “Malaysia Drink” in Mandarin, English and Uyghur script (see Figure 1.1).¹ Why focus on a drink’s putative geographical origin, and why Malaysia? Unable to locate the reason for my surprise, I instinctively wondered if it were *halal* (“permissible according to Islamic laws”). As I scrutinized the truck, I could not discern any explicit sign of its being *halal* (nor its Chinese equivalent, *qingzhen*), but two further observations emerged. I noticed that the pictured cans featured the tagline “Energy Drink” in Arabic (*mashroob attaaqa*), making them recognizable as products also exported to the Middle Eastern market; the use of Arabic might have also indexed its suitability to Muslims. But this detail was eclipsed by the much larger font used for “Malaysia drink.”

Having emerged as a leading player in the global *halal* market in the 1990s, Malaysia is at the forefront of the standardization of *halal* production, and has become a major certifier and producer of *halal* foods and cosmetics. Capitalizing on its strategic geographical location, already recognized as such by European travelers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Malaysia has been able to both export its *halal* products and offer “*halal* logistics” on a global scale, from the Gulf states to Japan and New Zealand. On May 14, 2018, a container ship filled with *halal* products inaugurated the “*Halal* Silk Route” with a voyage from western Malaysia’s North Port to Weifang, Shandong, in Northeastern China. Its cargo was destined to reach China’s Muslim provinces of Shaanxi, Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai and Xingjian, as “the first step towards linking the approximately 2.1 billion global Muslim population through the trade of *halal* products.”² Besides providing the goods, Malaysia’s Islamic Development Department (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, JAKIM) has also certified Weifang as the first Chinese *halal* port operator, qualifying it fit to retain the purity of the products.³

The status of Malaysia’s *halal* certification in China points at the emergence of this Southeast Asian country as a new site of *Islamic* authority beyond the confines of its own territory. A similar dynamic has also become evident in the field of women’s religious authority, for example. As in the 1980s Zainah Anwar, in collaboration with five other Malaysian women and the African-American Muslim scholar amina wadud, had created Sisters in Islam (a group interested in promoting women’s rights within the framework of Islam), in 2007–2009 she contributed to the creation of Musawah (Arabic for “equality”) as “a global movement to bring together activists and scholars to shape a new dominant discourse that reconciles Islam



Figure 1.1 Advertisement for “Malaysia Drink” in Turfan (Xinjiang, China) (© Chiara Formichi).

with human rights.”⁴ Musawah was launched at a gathering in Kuala Lumpur attended by over 250 participants from more than 40 countries (Mir-Hosseini, Al-Sharmani, and Rumminger, 2015: xi). In April 2017, a group of Indonesian religious scholars, academic researchers, and activists hosted the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI), or Indonesia’s Conference

of Female Ulama. The conference took place in a rural Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in West Java, and while the initiative was led by two of Indonesia's most well-known Islamic feminist organizations, it attracted women from many Muslim-majority countries (including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan, and Kenya). Malaysia's *halal* standardization and broader regional trends advancing female religious authority are two open challenges to discourses and attitudes that for centuries have privileged an Arab "center" over Asian "peripheries," the former identified as "authentic," and the latter as "derivative" or "syncretic."

Notwithstanding the number of Muslims living "across the river" – as the Romans and Arabs referred to the lands of Central Asia and beyond – the aura of authority carried by all things Arab is an established reality among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the early seventh century, the message of Islam was revealed in the Arabic language to Muhammad (c. 580–632), an Arab living in Arabia. According to a recent survey of individuals living in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where Arabic is the official language, 93% of those polled identified as Muslims.⁵ The Qur'an is recited in Arabic across the world, and the question of its translation has been a hotly debated one for well over a century; daily prayers are called for, and conducted, in Arabic; Arabic greetings and baby names are increasingly common among Muslims everywhere; after years of failure, in 2015, the Bangladesh Minister of Religious Affairs launched a new campaign against public urination, this time using Arabic signs: his motto was "same message, holier language."⁶

But it is not only believers who have ascribed exclusive authority and importance to Arabic. At its inception in European universities, the academic study of Islam was rooted in philological and other literary analyses of Arabic texts; later in the nineteenth century, this methodology was carried across the Atlantic and has since imbued public debates, outreach education, and everyday conversations on Islam. Ethnographic interest in Muslim societies emerged as a hallmark of Euro-American colonial scholarship and administration across Africa and Asia, and it was sustained until the mid-twentieth century. Muslims (and other subjects) were being observed and studied to guarantee territorial control over the colonies. In addition to the political framing of their scholarship, these scholars applied their exoticizing gaze: as Arabs were othered through several Orientalist tropes, so Asian subjects' identities were understood through the lenses of Hindu, Buddhist, and "spiritual" mysticism. Islam was foreign, and often portrayed as a threat to colonial order (see also Morgenstein Fuerst in this volume for the reverberations of this narrative on the creation of racialized and "problematic" Muslim minorities).

This approach to knowledge production did not change with the end of colonial regimes. In the late 1970s, Edward Said (1978) pointed the finger at the legacy of colonial ethnographies in anthropological writings published in the previous 20 years. The publication of Clifford Geertz's *The Religion of Java* had opened the field of anthropology to the study of "Muslim societies," but there Geertz concluded that "It is very hard for a Javanese to be a 'real Moslem'" because of the persistence of older cultural and religious norms (1960: 160). This was no different from the assessment made a century earlier by Protestant missionaries, who had described "the religion of present-day Java [a]s the product of Buddhism, Brahmanism, Shivaism, Mohammedanism, etc. not processed and brought together into a whole, but all mixed together and wonderfully confused" (Poensen 1865: 178). Similar polarizations between "authentic" Islamic practices in Arabia and derivative or syncretic practices at the peripheries were prominent in Geertz's second monograph, *Islam Observed* (1968), as well as Ernest Gellner's *Saints of the Atlas* (1969).

Scholarly engagements with Islam thus splintered between studies of texts and studies of practices; and because of the historical trajectory of Islam, authenticity was interlocked with seventh-century Arabia, its language, and its customs (see Khan, this volume, for the implications of this duality on understandings of Islamic finance in Pakistan). Far from being

limited to universities, this idea that Islam was coterminous with the Middle East has had lasting influences on museums, for example, where Islamic art galleries across Euro-America continue to display predominantly artifacts originating from the (greater) Middle East, with occasional nods to Spain (as Andalusia) and (Mughal) South Asia. In its own galleries, Asia remains squarely framed as Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian, and over the decades artifacts from China or Southeast Asia marked as “Islamic” were often treated as curiosities or imported objects (Formichi 2016; Shatanawi 2015; for a parallel analysis of Islamic music, see Rasmussen in this volume). Museums in Australia and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region have veered in a different direction for over a decade now, and the British Museum’s new Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World (opened in late 2018) remains a lonely exception in Europe (Norton-Wright 2020). Intellectual practices rooted in a dichotomous and polarized vision of Islamized territories that differentiated between a center – putatively holding the standard of authentic and pure Islam – and peripheries – where Islam was “mystical,” “syncretic,” or “deviationist,” have been unsettled by extraordinary scholarship produced in the new millennium, and focusing on movement, flows, exchanges, and conversations (among many I cite Ho (2006) and Ricci (2011) because of their influence on my own thinking; this issue is at the core of Torsten Tschacher’s contribution to this volume, with extensive discussion of and engagement with, the extant literature).

This volume, then, aims at subverting the established approach that studies and presents Islam as a primary feature of the Middle East and as foreign to Asia, where manifestations of Muslimness are seen as “syncretic.” Islam is the primary frame for analyses of Asia’s societies and histories, and Asia is the stage for various explorations of Islamic/Muslim rituals, aesthetics, textualities, and identities. Without denying the historical and devotional importance of Mecca, or the role played by Middle Eastern Muslims, the contributors to this *Handbook* lend their expertise to paint a picture of “Islam” as deeply and thoroughly connected to, and influenced by, Asia, and vice versa, often by-passing or reversing the relationships of power and authority that most often place “Arab” Islam in a hierarchically superior, or at least dominant, position *vis-à-vis* Asia. Here, we – the editor and contributors – collectively chart an agenda that shows possibilities for new scholarly endeavors.

Finding a Malaysian product on the streets of Turfan is not a mere outcome of modern-day globalization, Western-mediated mobility, or capitalism with Chinese characteristics. As I illustrate in this opening chapter, various parts of Asia have been connected through networks of trade for over a thousand years. Caravans crossed the Central Asian deserts and mountains trading silk and porcelain between the Mediterranean and China; dhows followed the monsoon across the western and eastern sides of the Indian Ocean, carrying spices and bodies between the Horn of Africa, the Arabian gulf, and Southeast Asia, stopping on the coasts of India. From the ninth century onwards, these connections were also mediated by Muslims. By the fifteenth century, Muslims dominated intra-Asian trading networks.

Muslims in Asia

Within a century of Muhammad receiving the first revelation (dated at about 610 CE), the Muslim empire had reached as far west as Spain and as far east as Multan, in today’s Pakistan. Even though the Quranic message had stated the importance of rejecting tribalism and embracing a “brotherhood of faith,” the social, political, and military structures of this new empire were hardwired in Arab culture, with Arab Muslims holding the highest positions. Newly conquered peoples were absorbed into the empire as laborers, bureaucrats, craftsmen, soldiers, and slaves, and conversion to Islam was disincentivized. As the vast majority of the imperial ranks and files

became filled with conquered, often enslaved soldiers, in the subsequent decades social discontent in the eastern provinces led to change; under Caliph ‘Umar II (r. 717–720), being Muslim was no longer synonymous with being Arab. That the fulcrum of the Muslim empire was no longer in Arabia had already been signaled by multiple relocations of the imperial capital: if Muhammad had made Medina the political center of his community, the ‘Umayyads (661–750) had chosen Damascus, and the ‘Abbasid dynasty (750–1258) built Baghdad as their seat of power. This dynasty’s advent was enabled by an anti-Arab rebellion ignited in the eastern-most province of the empire (Khorasan), and its first military enterprise was against the Chinese Tang army for control over today’s Uzbekistan.

‘Abbasid rule was geographically expansive and administratively fragmented, inevitably resulting in the gradual decline of its authority and the emergence of tributary, semi-independent, local dynasties. This affiliation was regularly re-affirmed through the performance of symbolic Islamic gestures, such as dedicating Friday sermons to the ‘Abbasid Caliph. Through these motions, from the ninth century onwards Central Asian peoples gradually converted to Islam. Those under Qarakhanid control (840–1212), for example, converted in large numbers after Satuq Bughra Khan (d. 955) embraced Islam (see Beben for conversion narratives in Central Asia).

Whereas traders of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds had been moving and interacting with each other across continental and oceanic Asia for centuries, it is known that Muslims soon started to establish their own networks (Elverskog 2010). And the existence of a Muslim space of shared experiences and referents, which did not necessarily sanction “the Middle East” as the most notable point of origin, is confirmed by a vast array of historical sources. A well-established point of intersection for traders operating in the eastern and western Indian Ocean, the Malabar coast, saw the emergence of mixed Arab–Indian Muslim communities (the Mappilas) likely as early as the ninth or tenth century. Not so differently, Chinese sources from the ninth century indicate the presence of settled Islamic communities in the trading hubs of coastal China. Court chronicles recorded that envoys visiting China’s Song court in the tenth–eleventh centuries bore Muslim names and hailed from Sumatra, the Southern Philippines and Cambodia (Champa) (Wade 2010). Northern India, besides its earliest military contacts in Sindh (conquered by Ibn Qasim in 711), began to be Islamized at the turn of the thirteenth century when Turkic dynasties, often established by formerly enslaved soldiers (referred to as *ghulams* or *mamluks*), now settled in Central Asia, expanded their reach southwards.

In the account of his late thirteenth-century travels, Marco Polo noted that “the people of Ferlec [in Sumatra] used all to be idolaters, but owing to contact with Saracen merchants, who continually resort here in their ships, [they] have all been converted to the law of Mahomet.” Here, Marco Polo was applying his Euro-centric lens, which made him think of Islam as coterminous with the Mediterranean, hence the reference to “Saracen merchants” when reflecting on the Islamization of Southeast Asia (in Reid 1995: 3–7; on the use of the term Saracen in the Middle Ages, see Tolan 2002). In fact, although possible that Arabs and Persians had landed on the north-western coast of Sumatra, it is far more likely that it had been converts from South Asia that popularized Islam in Southeast Asia, as we know that few merchants made the entire journey across both sides of the Indian Ocean.

When pursued, the long journey across the two sides was more characteristic of scholars and pilgrims. The thirteenth century Abu ‘Abd Allah Ma’sud b. Muhammad al-Jawi – “once known as a great and famous shaykh in the city of Aden and surrounding areas. He was one of the greats, a shaykh and jurist of the people of ‘Uwaja” – embodied in his *nisba* (toponym) a connection to Southeast Asia, rather than a reference to his time spent teaching in Mecca (Feener and Laffan 2005). As a poetic description of his virtues compared him to the fragrances

of Southeast Asia's camphor, aloe wood and incense benzoin – most sought-after resins in West Asia – al-Jawi stands as representative of a vital flow of minds and goods between the two endpoints of the Indian Ocean (the sacred and physical connections between Yemen and Java are explored in this volume by Ismail Alatas, while Brannon Ingram addresses the Deobandi spiritual relationship between Mecca and India). A few decades later, the North African traveler and jurist Ibn Battuta described well-organized Muslim communities in the Maldives, India, Sumatra, and China, and the informal networks that connected them to each other. Ibn Battuta had been moving following a web of Islamic connections, and referenced extremely mobile Muslims from various parts of Asia more often than traveling Arab Muslims.

A century later, the African trader Bava Gor was one of many settled professionals in Gujarat; he was also hailed as a “saint,” and his tomb, and that of his sister Mai Misra, remain to this day important sites of pilgrimage for Muslims in India (as discussed by Jazmin Graves in this volume). Coins attest to commercial exchanges with Africa beginning with the common era, and African traders were common in the subcontinent. Alongside several important African scholars (see Mahmood Kooria here), were the enslaved Africans employed in homes, fields, and armies across the subcontinent. Malik Ambar, the famed sixteenth-century military commander and strategist who kept the Mughal Sultan Jahangir busy and preoccupied on the Deccani frontier for over 20 years, was one of the millions of slaves taken from East Africa and sold in India as soldiers, bodyguards, or laborers. Malik Ambar also became a committed Muslim who “offered his prayers along with the common people,” (in Robbins and McLeod 2006: 58) instructed his own soldiers in the Qur'an, and gave generously in charity (Ali 2016).

By the fifteenth century there were established Muslim settlements across the Himalayan region, and several of the Hindu-Buddhist empires of maritime Southeast Asia had been transformed into Muslim Sultanates. In China, not only were there many Muslim towns across the Chinese Empire, but the Ming dynasty also enlisted Muslim scientists, bureaucrats, generals, and craftsmen in its entourage. In eastern Asia Muslims might have been a numerical minority, but Islam was neither marginal nor “foreign” (for architectural and legalistic-textual analyses, see Steinhart's and Tontini's contributions, respectively).

Becoming and being Muslim

After centuries of sustained exchanges, forged through various networks and webs of pilgrims, scholars, traders, and enslaved individuals, Asia had become a cohesive space of Islamized interaction. Quite obviously, the process of Islamization did not occur in a cultural vacuum, but neither did Islam unfold onto Asia's societies as a blanket, covering – smothering – pre-existing cultures. Ongoing, gradual and wide-ranging interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims across maritime and continental Asia allowed “Islam” – understood as a system encompassing textual and legal exegesis as much as rituals, aesthetics, and individuals' outer appearances and lifestyles – to spread through sustained conversations with local practices. “Islam” took hold and shape through processes of exchange (this is addressed by several contributions, most saliently those by Tschacher and Xavier on South Asia; Tontini and Steinhart on China; Arjana on Southeast Asia; and Beben and Dağyeli on Central Asia; Huma Ahmed-Ghosh focuses on regional histories while exploring Islamic feminisms, and Eren Tasar reads Soviet atheistic sources as windows on Islamic piety).

With the military conquest of Sindh in 711, this northwestern corner of the Indian subcontinent saw elements of Arab-Islamic, Indic and Persian cultures permeating each other. By the twelfth century, Hindu icons were cast on the main entrance to Delhi's Quwwat-ul-Islam's mosque (Flood 2009). The earliest mosques in maritime South and Southeast Asia mirrored the

architecture of other places of worship, such as the Meru-shaped multi-tiered roofs of Hindu temples (Njoto 2015); not only were local building styles better suited to the climate, but they also integrated well in the landscape (Prange 2018). Guangzhou's Huaisheng mosque was similarly built following the floor plans of Buddhist and Daoist compounds (Steinhardt 2015: 69, also this volume), and most mosques across China followed the architectural features of pagodas.

What made these spaces Islamic, then? On the one hand, inside areas were decorated with Arabic calligraphic panels, and functional architectural details also connected the building to "the center of Islam" through *mihrab* praying niches and their Mecca-oriented wall (*qibla*). On the other hand, we see the emergence of local Islamic decorative features: the mosque of Mantingan, a small town on the north coast of Java, is decorated with abstracted zoomorphic carvings whose patterns are recognizably Hindu-Buddhist, yet modified to pursue an Islamically-compliant aniconic choice (Njoto 2018). If outer appearances were meant to blend in and not disrupt, the interior areas of these buildings were distinctively and unequivocally Islamic. A similar approach can be embraced when analyzing texts that articulated Muslim identity and behavior, directly or indirectly. The eighteenth-century Javanese manuscript "The song of the house of Gold" described the king as a pious Sufi warrior who ought to seek inspiration from traditional Javanese martial arts, as well as Islamic piety (Ricklefs 2006: 48–49; see also Ricklefs 1998: 115–125):

Take care and battle firmly.
Let the scriptures [*sastra*] serve as your subjects.
Let piety serve as your bow;
let *dhikr* serve as your quiver,
and the Qur'an as your arrows.
... Therefore you are given a position
by the Most Holy God,
because of your outstanding heroism on the field of battle.
... When you are consecrated as king,
don your royal garb:
let *khak* [reality, Ar. *haqq*] serve as your crown,
with *tarekat* [the mystical way] as its crest.
Struggle constantly [Ar. *mujahada*],
sarengat [the law] serving as your lower garment.

This was the Javanese ruler of Mataram Sultan Agung (1593–1645), who had gone by a string of indigenous titles until the *sharif* of Mecca appointed him "sultan" in 1641. Merle Ricklefs calls Sultan Agung "the reconciler," as a key figure in harmonizing Javanese and Muslim identities (2006: 33). By the time of Pakubuwana II (1711–1749), under whose auspices "The song of the house of Gold" had been composed, being Javanese and Muslim was an interlocked dimension.

These conversations were not unique to the world of the Indian Ocean. The battle of Talas in 751, which had ended with neither winners nor losers, created a buffer zone of sort in the Tarim Basin (also referred to as Eastern Turkestan, Western China, or Xinjiang), where this chapter started. This area, already at the heart of long-established trading routes, would remain a cradle for the interaction of Turkic, Persianate and Chinese cultures for centuries to come. In the beginning, "Persianate" influences were not necessarily manifestations of "Islamization," as ninth-century funerary inscriptions for elite Sasanid Zoroastrians, written in Middle Persian, have been found in Xi'an. By the eleventh century, most Central Asian Sufi works were written

in Persian, and, in the twelfth century, “sophisticated Quran translations [were crafted] in Persian rhyming prose,” forming an expanding body of religious writings in Persian that could be read from the Balkans to the Tarim Basin. But Arabo-Persian never became hegemonic, as, in fact, literary Turki (i.e., Chagatai or Ottoman Turkish) was intelligible across the same territorial span (Green 2019: 11, 18, 32). In the Ming era, while the emperors relied on Persian translating colleges to ensure clear communication with their tributary states in Central Asia (Green 2019: 125), several mosques housed bilingual inscriptions in Chinese and Persian, and Chinese cultural frameworks emerged as dominant in the *Han Kitab* Chinese literary tradition (Green 2019: 33; in this volume, Eric Schluessel pursues an analysis of the confluence of these multiple strands in the formation of Islamic law in Xinjiang).

By the time that Pakubuwana II was glorifying Sultan Agung’s harmonization, among coastal Chinese Muslim communities Chinese-Islamic texts deployed Confucian and Daoist frameworks to explain and illustrate Islamic precepts and duties. As argued by Benite Ben-Dor, “Chinese Muslim scholarship of the [Qing] period began to reflect in important ways the growing sense of its producers that they were members of a distinct and distinguished Chinese intellectual tradition” (2005: 119). Born in Nanjing in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Liu Zhi was well versed in Arabic and Persian; the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist classics; and Jesuit literature. Through his writing, he advanced the proposition that the message of Islam was no different from the Confucian canon: “Once the five pillars are accomplished, the *dao* of heaven is fulfilled” (in Tontini 2016: 37; also this volume).

As illustrated at the beginning of the chapter, travelers, colonialists and scholars until the latter part of the twentieth century were imbibed in the idea that “Islamic” meant “Arab” (maybe sometimes “Ottoman” or “Persian”), and everything else was “syncretic.” Putting distance with older paradigms of syncretism, in more recent years scholars have approached these phenomena through a variety of lenses (see Benite Ben-Dor 2005, DeWeese 1994, Flood 2009, Ricci 2011, Ricklefs 2006, Thum 2017; Tschacher, this volume). At the bottom of these analyses is agreement over the fact that, as put by Stewart and Ernst, “every ‘pure’ tradition turns out to contain mixed elements” (2003: 586–588). Indeed, the prototypical image of a Middle Eastern mosque with minarets and domes was a patchwork of Levantine pre-Islamic sacred architecture: the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (built in 691) was inspired by Constantine’s Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The early eight-century ‘Umayyad Mosque of Damascus was built on a Phoenician site turned Temple of Jupiter, turned Byzantine cathedral; the latest re-structuring retained four towers (originally hermits’ towers), which had also inspired Caliph Mu’awiya to request the addition of four towers to the new mosque of Fustat, Egypt, in the 670s.

Conversations and exchanges did not happen only at the level of the built environment. The Qur’an announced itself to be a continuation of previous revelations, Muhammad’s work being a reminder of previous prophets and the Ka’ba standing as “the first house [of worship] to be established for people ... the place where Abraham stood to pray” (Qur’an 3:96–97). Islamic rituals and practices are a vivid representation of the tension between continuity and change, as in the case of the *hajj* pilgrimage for example. Mecca’s Ka’ba had been a destination for pilgrimage already in pagan times, and what is today referred to as “the *hajj*” came into being during Muhammad’s lifetime; this tradition *in fieri* was eventually canonized as “correct practice” (i.e., “orthodoxy”) on the model of Muhammad’s last iteration of it (Peters 1994). Many Islamic pilgrimage sites across Asia emerged in the same way, giving new meanings to pre-existing sites (see Arjana on *ziyara* sites in Southeast Asia and Xavier on Sri Lanka, both this volume; other pilgrimages are discussed by Aziza Shanazarova and Karen Ruffle, both this volume, in the context of Central Asia and Shi’i South Asia, respectively).

Shahab Ahmed has eloquently discussed how orthodoxy was the result of a deliberate project to “establi[sh] norms of religious praxis,” a “self-consciously *authoritative* and *prescriptive* discourse aimed at defining the *normative* legal, praxial, and creedal content of Islam, and thus at constituting the articulated identity of the Muslim community” (Ahmed 2017: 21, emphasis in the original). Notably, this community, the *umma*, that was being defined through this restrictive discourse, also took agency over the shaping of orthopraxy. While accepting the orthodoxy established in the early centuries of Islam – to follow Shahab’s example, universally accepting that the Satanic verses were never pronounced – Muslims embodied, practiced, and expressed their religious belonging in a multiplicity of equally valid ways.

Beyond the center-periphery dichotomy

The sacrality of Mecca and Medina, known as *al-haramayn* (“the two holy sites”), remained (and still is) undisputed, anchored to the life story of Muhammad and its legacy. Far from being an exclusively devotional anchor, political control over these sites has also been used throughout the centuries to project authority over Muslims worldwide. In the sixteenth century, the Ottomans strived to “convince Indian Ocean Muslims that the *idea* of a universal caliphate, with the Ottoman sultan at its head, was in fact meaningful and worthy of support.” (Casale 2012: 129). At the end of the nineteenth century, Caliph Abdulhamid II (1842–1918, r. 1876–1909) proclaimed “the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph of the Muslim World” and in the following years undertook several propaganda initiatives to project his religious authority onto Muslims who lived outside of the Ottoman territory. A century later, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia combined financial means (petrodollars flowing in from the 1973 oil crisis-and-boom) with historical capital (control of Mecca and Medina) to project on the global stage its theologico-legal approach (Wahhabism) as the purest and most authentic orthodox path to Islamic salvation.

But, in fact, intellectual vibrancy and scholarly depth were more often than not injected by foreign pilgrims and scholars. As early as in the tenth century the foremost representatives of *ilmu’l-hadith* (the study of sayings of the Prophet, tasked with verifying the chains of transmission of the recorded *hadiths* and these individuals’ life-stories) hailed from Bukhara and the eastern regions of the Muslim empire. From the sixteenth century onwards, Muslims from the Indian Ocean rim were among the most prolific and engaged legal scholars based in Mecca (Kooria 2016, and this volume), and the vision of the Central Arabian Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) was originally informed by the South Asian *muhaddith* (scholar of *hadith*) Muhammad Hayya al-Sind (d. 1750) (Voll 1975: 32) (on South Asia as a hub of Islamic reform, see Ingram, this volume, on Deobandi). When he arrived in Mecca in the late nineteenth century, the Dutch colonial officer Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje noted that “the great majority of the students come from abroad,” including Java, Malaya, Malabar, and Dagestan (Snouck Hurgronje 2007 [1889]: 203; for more on Snouck Hurgronje, see Rasmussen’s discussion of the *haji* in this volume). And important voices in the Ottoman pan-Islamic propaganda were neither Arab nor Turk, but Central Asian (e.g., Jamaluddin “al-Afghani,” 1838/1839–1897).

For Sunni and Shi’a communities alike, the relationship between perceived centers and peripheries is a dynamic one (see Fuchs and Ruffle in this volume on South Asia’s Shi’is, and Beben on Central Asia’s Isma’ilis, also this volume). Today, Muslims and Islamic institutions in Asia are carving an important niche as world leaders in defining “correct practices,” as followers of the Prophetic example (see Noor, this volume, on Tablighi Jama’at) or standardization of Islamic banking and *halal* food regulation (see Khan and Fischer, respectively, in this volume). In an additional counterpoint, it was not only the Ottoman and Saudi states who sought to

expand their sphere of influence on “the global *umma*.” In the 1920s–1930s, the expanding Japanese Empire incorporated pan-Islamism into its pan-Asian discourse: its propaganda spoke directly to China’s Sino-Muslims as key members of the new Empire, and the Greater Japan Muslim League also aimed at reaching out to, and possibly bring in the support of, Muslims across Asia and beyond (Hammond 2020, and this volume). Of Bukharan descent, the Tatar Abdurreshid Ibrahim (1853–1944) was an important figure in instilling Pan-Islamic ideas in Japan and to physically connect Asian Muslim reformers; after being forced to leave Russia, he spent his time advancing the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic agendas in Istanbul and travelling across the Muslim lands, from Egypt to Western China and Japan.

The field of Islamic Studies has been embedded for centuries in the hierarchical view of the Islamized world as anchored at a center with sprawling peripheries. This has deep roots in Arab ethnocentricity, the importance of Arabic as the language of scriptures, as well as Orientalist and colonial interpretations. Islam was seen as “authentic” and “original” in its Arab center, and “derivative” or “foreign” everywhere else. In ascribing (whether implicitly or explicitly) authenticity and purity to a geographically and temporally fixed expression of religion – namely, Muhammad’s Medinan society as recalled and narrated by his companions in the years and decades following his death – one creates the illusion that there is only one way of expressing belonging to a community. Authority and legitimacy are consequently granted to those who seek to propagate (sometimes forcefully implement) that specific expression. The memory of the historical trajectories that brought to life that specific manifestation is erased, and, conversely, the erosion of other expressions of piety and devotion is justified. Ultimately, Orientalist stereotypes are perpetuated, while often racialized hierarchies are endorsed.

But if one reframes the global map to de-center Europe, if one takes a non-static point of view, focusing instead on movement, conversations, exchanges, and change through space and time, and if one embraces the notion of orthodoxy as socially, politically, and historically contextual, then that territorial and maritime expanse linking the Mediterranean to the Pacific, which we call Asia, becomes a natural space for exploring Islam beyond the dichotomies of pure/derivative, authentic/foreign, or center/periphery.

How to read this volume

This *handbook* offers both new and established scholarship on Muslim societies and religious practices across Asia. Presenting work deeply grounded in archival, literary, and ethnographic inquiry, these contributions aim at challenging readers, to attempt to dislodge the deeply ingrained assumption that Asia is at the periphery of Islam, and Islam is at the periphery of Asia’s cultural matrix. The volume is thus agenda-setting against the center/periphery dichotomy as well as the syncretism and great/little tradition frameworks that for so long have dominated conversations on Islam in Asia. Some readers might feel that there are “gaps.” Whereas this was made inevitable by logistical constraints that ranged from the length of the volume and colleagues’ availability, to the challenges of pursuing such a collaborative project during the Covid-19 pandemic, I also want to add that it was an editorial choice to privilege this approach over an absolutely comprehensive geographical spread. Most chapters included here do not offer points of arrival, they do not stop at giving an assessment of the state of scholarship, but rather push ahead, opening new windows on how to address questions related to the study of Islam in the “Asian context,” paving the way for further research.

This is the primary goal of Part I, “Frames.” Made of five chapters, this section takes history (Formichi, this chapter), race (Morgenstein Fuerst), music and the five pillars (Rasmussen), language (Tschacher), and gender (Ahmed-Ghosh) as their respective primary lenses to rethink

the geography of Islam, and the hermeneutics of the relationship between “Islam” and “Asia.” Possibly creating some discomfort, these contributions are aimed at illustrating problems, offering guiding questions to address them, and hopefully opening new avenues for future research. The remaining contributions are arranged in three thematic sections.

Part II, “Authority and authorizing practices,” includes chapters ranging from early modern African scholars in South Asia (Kooria) to women saints and their shrines in Central Asia (Shanazarova); the vicissitudes of Islamic law in Xinjiang (Schluessel), banking in Pakistan (Khan), and *halal* standardization in Southeast Asia (Fischer); patterns of authority among the Shi’a of Pakistan (Fuchs) and conversion narratives in Central Asia (Beben). Following this, Part III is “Muslim spatialities.” Whereas fluidity and movement are the foundation of the entire volume, these contributions take “space” as their analytical lens, whether under the rubric of sacred geographies (Alatas in Java; Arjana across Southeast Asia; Ruffle in South Asia; and Xavier in Sri Lanka), unexpected alliances in twentieth-century East Asia (Hammond), or a most sacred space for Muslims, the mosque (Steinhardt, focusing on China). Lastly, Part IV, “Imaginations of piety,” explores ways in which religious practices have been (re)imagined under changing circumstances. Jazmin Graves explores the impact of the trans-oceanic journey of Africans to India and their sanctification; Roberta Tontini analyzes reformulations of what it means to “be Muslim” in China in the seventeenth century and today, and Brannon Ingram asks similar questions for late-colonial India; Farish Noor follows the Deobandis’ journey to becoming Tablighi Jamaat, and their geographical expansion into Southeast Asia. Eren Tasar and Jeanine Dağyeli query the intersection of religious practices and Soviet culture in the realms of everyday life and work ethics, respectively.

Regardless of this organization, the volume can be read in various ways; the chapters are in conversation with each other, but have also been written to be read in isolation, or to be perused following geographical or topical threads. For example, one could follow the thread of gender starting with Huma Ahmed-Ghosh’s provocative framing essay, and then follow women as they appear in the chapters by Shanazarova, Dağyeli and Tasar (Central Asia), Ruffle and Graves (South Asia), Xavier (Sri Lanka) and Arjana (Southeast Asia). Tschacher’s analysis of the relationship between Islamic and Sanskritic terms offers instead solid foundations for a critical revisitation of “syncretism,” an endeavor sustained throughout the volume by Beben (Central Asia), Khan (Pakistan), Arjana and Rasmussen (Indonesia), Tontini and Steinhardt (China), Xavier, and Graves.

Anne Rasmussen’s chapter challenges “monolithic assumptions about ‘music and Islam,’” and she does so following Java’s soundscape of the five pillars (the *shahada* testimony of faith, *salat* prayer, fasting during Ramadan, *zakat* tax, and *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca). The pillars also emerge in Roberta Tontini’s exploration of the process of regionalization of Islamic law among sinophone Muslims. As both Rasmussen and Tontini attend to processes of adaptation and exchange in manifestations and formulations of the pillars, other contributions also go well beyond canonical disquisitions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. While some explore non-*hajj* pilgrimages (see Shanazarova on Central Asia; Ruffle, Graves, and Xavier on South Asia; and Arjana, Alatas and Noor on Southeast Asia), others investigate the intricate ways in which Islamic law interfaces with non-Islamic factors in Muslim minority and majority settings alike (besides Tontini, see also Schluessel on the Uyghur of Xinjiang; Khan on banking in Pakistan; and Fischer on *halal* rules in Southeast Asia).

Muslim minorities are extensively discussed across the volume, beginning with Ilyse Morgenstern Fuerst’s thought-provoking chapter on minoritization and racialization. Minority Muslim communities in South Asia are discussed by Kooria and Graves (both of whom touch on the double-minority status of African Muslims), Fuchs and Ruffle (who focus on different

aspects of Shi'a communities there), Xavier and Tschacher (on Sri Lanka), and Ingram (on India's Deobandis). Fischer, Noor, and Arjana include reflections on Southeast Asia's Muslim minority of Singapore; Beben looks at the Isma'ilis of Central Asia; while Hammond, Tontini, Steinhardt, and Schluessel focus on a variety of minority groups across China.

It is thus that the contributions to this *Handbook* hope to provide a solid grounding to studying Islam in Asia beyond the center-and-periphery perspective that for so long has dominated the field. Beyond content, this volume also respects the vast variety and equal standing of vernacular languages across Muslim Asia; instead of attempting any homogenization of local variations on "Arabic" terms, each contribution reflects the transliteration preference of its author.

Notes

- 1 This essay is a brief summary of Formichi (2020), further enriched by the contributions to this very volume. In addition to citations to direct quotes, I have included references to materials that I deem foundational to the analysis pursued here. More detailed discussions of any topic are to be found in this volume or Formichi (2020) and references therein.
- 2 Datuk Azman Shah Mohd Yusof, CEO of Northport (M) Bhd, quoted by Habhajan Singh, "Powering the Halal Silk Route," September 7, 2018, *The Malaysian Reserve*, <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2018/09/07/powering-the-halal-silk-route/>
- 3 Beh Yuen Hui, May 16, 2018 "A bigger market share for Malaysia's halal products," *The Star Online*.
- 4 "Musawah Milestones," *Vision*, September 2017, p. 3.
- 5 2010 Pew Research Forum Report, www.globalreligiousfutures.org/regions/middle-east-north-africa
- 6 <https://www.rt.com/news/256289-bangladesh-arabic-pissing-public/>

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2

MINORITIZATION, RACIALIZATION, AND ISLAM IN ASIA

Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst

When I teach the popular “Introducing Islam” course, I begin with a survey. “Where do most Muslims live?” “Which of the following is the most populous Muslim country?” “If you had to guess, how many years have Muslims lived in the following countries (as we know them today): Egypt? Saudi Arabia? India? China? The United States? Brazil? Russia?” “What language do you think most Muslims speak as their primary language?” Without fail, my students overwhelmingly report that Muslims are from the Middle East, speak Arabic, and have lived the fewest years in Asian, European, or American countries. One student memorably announced that I was trolling them – there had never been Muslims in China, he insisted.

I do this exercise precisely because I think my students are motivated, smart, (mostly) young people, whose educations have nevertheless left them utterly ignorant about global history generally, Asia broadly, and Muslims perhaps especially. It is, in a way, meant to be a “gotcha” ice-breaker teaching moment: we get to spend the rest of our first week talking about how those misconceptions color our class, its theme, and our interpretation of major ideas. Because, of course, we correct those assumptions: I tell them that more Muslims live in Asia than anywhere else in the world; that most Muslims do not speak Arabic as a primary or home language; that Muslims have lived in what we now call India and the United States since the eighth and seventeenth centuries respectively, well before either place would have been called by either name. Bright students come to my classroom not-knowing because of racialization and minoritization, which has a unique and disproportionate effect on Black Muslims (perhaps especially in the US) and Asian Muslims, both of which are systematically left out of curricula, media, popular culture, and common knowledge.

More Muslims live in Asia than anywhere else in the world, and yet when we discuss Islam, we imagine a Muslim homeland, identity, ethnicity, and race tied to the Middle East. How that happened – how ideas about who is Muslim, who is not, where are “Muslim lands,” and what constitutes a “Muslim World” (Aydin 2017) – are related to processes of minoritization and racialization. In this chapter, I discuss how, together, racialization and minoritization create a narrative that forms modern understandings of Muslims. Where *minoritization* collapses a group into a singularity with both identifiable and marginal traits, *racialization* marks individuals as having immutable traits because of their membership to a particular group. Muslims in Asia are often defined as a demographic minority within particular nation-states, but *minoritization* refers to the experience of power; Muslims in Asia are minoritized. Likewise, as I say to students

frequently: religions are not races – Islam is not a race – but Islam and its practitioners are *racialized*. Racialization and minoritization do not function solely as external labels thrust upon Europe’s Others, whether historically or contemporarily. Indeed, these processes often demand and require the participation of those who have been racialized and minoritized. These are pernicious systems of power, definition, and classification that have specific implications, histories, and effects for Muslims in Asia.

To get at the ideas of racialization and minoritization, and how they come to affect Muslims in Asia in particular, I will first define my terms in some detail; these theoretical terms are anything but simple and not to be uniformly applied. Then, I will demonstrate these theories applied by offering an overview of the historical development of the racialization and minoritization of Muslims, using South Asia as an example. Next, I will offer a brief contemporary case study highlighting racialization and minoritization of Muslims in Asia today, focusing on China and, specifically, Uyghurs. Finally, I will suggest that Euro–American research and academic patterns reinforce these pernicious systems of power and classification – but that we can strive for nuance and change.

Defining our theoretical terms: Minoritization and racialization

Minoritization does not refer solely to the demographic realities of a particular location, but instead to the systematic process by which elites deny power or access to a group through the implementation of power, be that local, linguistic, economic, or political (Tettey and Puplampu 2005: 94). Minoritization is a process through which a group, often formerly dominant or prominent, is stripped of agency, power, or prestige. This has been achieved by both *de jure* and *de facto* shifts that have included, as examples, the discontinuation of local languages within systems of governance (as in colonial South Asia) or within public spheres (as in barring numerous Indigenous communities from using their languages); the literal stripping of rights (i.e., either the establishment or alteration of laws that prohibit particular cultural or social practices); and (real or perceived) mistreatment of one group as opposed to any other.

Minoritization is also an ongoing process; it is not something that is written into law or that comes about socially simply. It is a series of *de facto* and *de jure* events – within and outside of legal and official arenas – that often inspire as much group identification as it tries to name, and it can be mercurial: the same group that is minoritized in places of privilege can be privileged in places that are minoritized. Much has been written about minoritization (e.g., Goh 2008; Anford 2009; Morgenstein Fuerst 2017; Mamdani 2020), but what matters most here is the idea that it structures social interaction, often has legal backing, and represents how a group is perceived as both a distinctive group and as one that lacks (or ought to lack) power. To be rather simplistic, then, minoritization is a process through which a group is disenfranchised.

As a reminder, when a group is collapsed into a singularity with both identifiable and marginal traits, we are talking about minoritization; but racialization marks individuals as having unchangeable traits because of their membership (real or assumed) in a particular group. The concept and construct of race includes essentialization of groups based upon traits imagined to be inherent, hereditary, and prognostic – that is to say, rooted in biology (or pseudo-biology) and therefore scientifically “real” (Robb 1995: 1). Racialization is the process through which a group is made or marked as a race; it is the process through which individuals are made manifest as both belonging to one cogent group as well as possessing those inherent, hereditary, and prognostic characteristics.

To repeat: religions are not races. Islam is not a race. But religions, including Islam, are and have been *racialized*. As Sylvester Johnson has masterfully demonstrated, assumptions of race

as tied to phenotype or biology fail to capture the ways in which power – especially colonial power – invented, assigned, and defined race based upon exclusionary definitions that were *not* tied to specific bodies (2015: 383, 398–400). In other words, while some assume that “race” is the same as “color,” this is not the case; “race” has been tied to color and physical features, to be sure, but also notions of “nature,” “temperament,” “disposition,” and – yes – religion, language, region, and more (Goodwin and Morgenstein Fuerst 2020). While Islam is not a race, Muslims are racialized and defined racially in large part based upon their relationship to imperial power.

These are pernicious systems of power, definition, and classification. With respect to Muslims in Asia, racialization and minoritization relied on stories told about them by imperialists and colonizers. While much of my own research has centered the Great Rebellion of 1857 as a place where we see these patterns both clearly and historically, as we will see below, the narrative of racialization and minoritization has different nuances across Asia, as I hope we would expect. That said: while nuance is vital to understanding local and regional histories, the broadest notions of both “race” and “minority” belie a pattern of grouping Muslims together, imagining that group as inherently problematic, and often in counter distinction to the “proper” inhabitants of Asia.

Make no mistake: these processes are the products of (colonial) modernity. Many debate the precise definition of modernity, and its exact start date, but few would be so bold or foolish as to decouple the global ideological hegemony of modernity from coloniality. Modernity – the historical period, ideology, and governance structures bent towards progress – is reliant upon structures of domination, religious definition, and racial logics. Islamic studies scholar and historian SherAli Tareen rather elegiacally describes modernity as:

On one account, modernity refers to a time period: roughly the late eighteenth century onward (a highly contested temporal marker of course), hence the often and aptly employed construction “colonial modernity.” Modernity also signals a particular normative disposition suffused with some of its signature values like valorizing autonomy over heteronomy, championing scientific rationality over claims of faith, and privileging certainty over ambiguity. Seen from yet another perspective, modernity is marked by new technologies and institutions, especially that most modern of all institutions: the modern state. Modernity, indeed, much like secularism, is indelibly entangled with modern state sovereignty. There is no modernity without the modern state. Modernity is the article of faith, the doctrinal fuel if you will, that authorizes and engines the sovereign power of the modern state, and often justifies its unparalleled and unprecedented violence: militarily and epistemically.

Tareen 2020

What Tareen indicates, then, is that modernity is a time period, a set of ideas and ideologies, a new structure of statehood.

Similarly, renowned historian Mahmood Mamdani argues that colonial modernity has two phases: in the first, European empires tried direct rule, the attempt to convert (religion pun intended: this is a project of white Christianities) indigenous populations to European images; in the second, after the first failed, we see European empires shifting gears, seeking not to convert but to extract and exploit. He writes: “Direct rule sought to build nations akin to that of the colonizer, indirect rule merely to hold and exploit territories,” (Mamdani 2020: 10; cf. Mamdani 1995; Mamdani 2012). Mamdani also argues that while direct rule set up nation-building for colonizers, indirect rule set up nation-building premises for the twentieth century; it is a preface of sorts for nationalisms that are built on ideas of who can live where, distinct

lines of cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious formation, and patterns of local power backed by both geopolitical reality and specific world powers (2020: 11–13). To summarize, then: modernity was a colonial project; the colonial project established groups within hard-and-fast categories and then posited those groups as authentic, legitimate, proper, or authorities; groups were first made into cogent and lasting minorities and races during this period but with major ramifications – and ongoing shifts – well beyond it.

Minorities, it cannot be stated enough, are made, and not entirely rooted in demography. One can be a small population but maintain significant power over a large majority – as in most colonial regimes, perhaps most infamously apartheid in South Africa. Demography alone does not predict minority status; minoritization relies on power, not numbers. In Asia, Muslims are a demographic majority in some places (Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and a demographic minority in others (India, China, Sri Lanka, Japan, Philippines, Myanmar). These have both shifted and been created over time, of course: India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were created in large part based on ideas about religio-racial identities, proper inhabitation of land, and national identities as singular. But being made into a minority – being disenfranchised legally, socially, and politically – has ongoing resonance and global backing, as we will see below.

Similarly, races are made, as race is a social construct and not a biological essential. In the nineteenth century, race was a primary way in which communities were imagined – first, perhaps, as an imposition by European and American imperialists and colonizers, but later, as part of the way people across power structures understood themselves and each other. European and American imperialists often grouped – and reduced – disparate people(s) by physical appearance, phenotype, and various cultural practices, creating singular and subordinate “races.” Race often encompasses religious and ethnic markers because of racialization. For example, sociologist Zaheer Baber argues that in India “religious markers have been deployed historically not just to demarcate ethnic boundaries but also in the long run to initiate a process of ‘racialization’ of such differences” (2004: 703).

Racialization refers to the process by which one group becomes signified based upon embodied characteristics thought to be prognostic, immutable, and hereditary. This is to say that race *predicts* behavior, aptitude, and eligibility for certain protections; cannot be changed; and is genetic. Racialization encodes many ideas, but chief among them is a scientific rationale; racialization is a process that relies on ascribed differences that are vital to social structures, with these differences often imagined or stated in terms of *biological* difference, however disproved this “science” has been (e.g., Rex 1970: 39; Omi and Winant 1986; Miles 1991: 75).

Once again, Baber helpfully synthesizes historic scholarship on the process of racialization. He writes that

most social scientists would agree that race is a social construct that is sustained, reproduced and transformed through its intersection with institutional arrangements, ideologies and discursive formations,

and that therefore

the work of essentializing entire groups of people with immutable, inheritable and quasi-biological behavioral attributes contributes to the process of constituting and simultaneously “racializing” what might indeed be nothing more than cultural differences.

Baber 2004: 712

For Muslims in India, as we will see below, minoritization was concurrent with racialization: as Britons seized control of South Asia, British imperialism reduced Muslims from a diverse range of ethnicities, classes, and castes to a singular group endowed with the “immutable, inheritable and quasi-biological behavioral attributes” Baber describes. For Muslims in China, as we will also explore below, minoritization and racialization are as much legal categorizations as unique historical processes in China alone. The definition of Uyghurs as both ethnically and racially separate from other Chinese people and groups – which is to say, biologically and hereditarily unique – has been given credence both through local governance practices and through global racializations of Muslims and Islam after 9/11. These processes are complicated, dynamic, and, at times, mercurial. They are real and have real effects, nevertheless.

While it is perhaps easier or more comfortable to name the abuses of states and empires of the past, the effects of racialization in the colonial period – and colonization writ large – is an ongoing project, one tied up in systems of law and economics. As legal scholar Nadine El-Enany argues, coloniality is ongoing, specifically in Britain: “people with personal, ancestral, or geographical histories of colonization cannot escape their condition of coloniality. There is a direct causal link between colonialism and ongoing wealth disparity and inequality in income and land distribution in former colonies” (El-Enany 2020: 1–2). She continues, discussing immigration law and the logic of racialization:

Contemporary immigration law thus maintains the global racial order established by colonialism, whereby racialized populations are disproportionately deprived of access to resources, healthcare, safety and opportunity and are systematically and disproportionately made vulnerable to harm and premature death.

El-Enany 2020: 13

El-Enany’s work points towards the parallel processes of minoritization and racialization: these are discursive, rhetorical, and social processes that also, as a hallmark of empire, become codified, part of the legal system. The connection between economic, legal, and social effects of racialization and minoritization are manifold and often hard to disambiguate. That said, El-Enany’s contemporary and legal focus on the effects of racialization help us see that these discourses and rhetorics – these “old” practices, laws, and policies of an empire that no longer exists – are anything but past. So, while in the nineteenth century, Muslims first came to be racialized in British South Asia, and while I will turn our attention to that case study next, it is of vital import that we remember this is a history with inordinate ramifications still with us today, which is why we will also explore China briefly below.

But to begin with the historical: in the mid-nineteenth century, despite vast evidence and widespread knowledge among Britons of the range of Muslim opinions and actions about the complicated legal matter of holy war, Muslims were reduced to jihadis, individuals who commit and are committed to *jihad*. Jihad, here, is the notion of mandated holy war against non-Muslims¹ and it quickly, almost immediately after the 1857 Rebellion, became the singular metric through which Muslims were understood discursively and regulated legally.

Theory applied: 1857 Rebellion, minoritization, and racialization

Theory, as I often say, without concrete examples is nonsense! Let’s make some sense of racialization and minoritization. To do so, let’s dig more deeply into the 1857 Rebellion in South Asia.

The parallel processes of minoritization and racialization are the crucial features of the aftermath of this set of events which is still referred to as a “watershed” moment in South Asian history. Before the Rebellion, Britons often read Muslims as fanatical, perhaps violent. After the Rebellion, Muslims were almost unequivocally understood as inherently violent, obligated to revolt. The shift here is from seeing *some* Muslims in stereotypical lenses to understanding *all* Muslims to be rebels. As I have argued elsewhere, this is clearest in the unmistakable rise and then exclusive use of the terms “jihad” and “jihadi” for and about Islam and Muslims after the Rebellion (Morgenstein Fuerst 2017; Morgenstein Fuerst 2019). This shift – from stereotyping *some* to categorizing *all* Muslims in predictable, prognostic ways – demonstrates the processes of both racialization and minoritization.

Beginning in May 1857, the Great Rebellion was a long, terrifying year of bloodshed, revolt, suppression, and suspicion. What began as an internal, military matter – the first shots, so to speak, were fired by enraged and disaffected *sepoys*, or soldiers – quickly spread beyond the garrison and involved civilians, with hangings, violence, and shelling marking the many connected revolts that comprise the Rebellion. There is so much to be said but what is vital here is that the Rebellion was cast in religious terms, with British officials citing religious sensibilities as a cause of the Rebellion; it was cast in religio-racial² terms, too, as commentators of all stripes noted inherent differences in the ways that groups planned for, were credited with, or were engaged in rebellion.

Just as the revolts began in 1857, so too did the numerous tracts, treatises, Parliamentary debate, and legal ramifications of Rebellion. These are of import to this essay, and they shared a common set of presumptions: namely, that Muslims were uniquely and distinctively responsible for the Rebellion, owing to their seditious, traitorous, and violent natures – evident, and most often located, in the language of jihad. The Rebellion is a discernable moment in the processes of the minoritization and racialization of Indian Muslims. In the example of the 1857 Rebellion, minoritization is a process by which Britons consolidated power over former Muslim ruling elites and the religious constituency they (supposedly) represented. There were the same *de jure* and *de facto* shifts described above: Islamicate languages, namely Persian, were discontinued in governmental settings; elite Muslims were stripped of access to power; representational aspirations rendered Muslims not just a demographic minority within South Asia, but a politically unimportant voice to British officials vis-à-vis their Hindu counterparts; and Muslims, being seen as uniquely culpable for the Rebellion, found themselves incurring different consequences (e.g., after the Rebellion ended and the skirmishes stopped, Hindus were allowed back into Delhi a full year before Muslims) (Morgenstein Fuerst 2017).

If *minoritization* collapsed Muslims into a singular group with identifiable traits and aimed to disenfranchise Muslims based upon those traits, *racialization* marked Muslims as having immutable traits – seditious, rebellious, unable to be ruled, impelled by their Islam to violence. These processes happened alongside each other, reinforcing one another. So, while Muslims found themselves losing agency within systems, they also found themselves portrayed and treated (socially and legally) as one homogenous group – gone were the *rigid* distinctions between elites and non-elites, for example. *Muslim* came to be a catch-all term, and all one needed to know or invoke (e.g., Hunter 1871; Khan 1860; cf. Gottschalk 2012; Stephens 2018).

After the Rebellion, Muslims in India come to be depicted as possessing inherent, unchanging, and transmittable characteristics. They are portrayed as inherently seditious, bound by both law and intrinsic disposition to violence, and necessarily ill-tempered, incorrigible, and unable to be ruled by non-Muslims. These are decidedly racialized classifications: Muslims

cannot escape these traits – they are imagined to be part of the fundamental composition of *what* and *who* is Muslim. To be otherwise, in effect, would indicate that one is *not* Muslim. We see Britons make claims to the inherent and transmittable characteristics of Muslims in bald-faced statements below; we will also see more obtuse references to supposedly inalienable traits of Muslims in works by both Muslims and Britons.

As but one primary example, W. W. Hunter, a British official and scholar, wrote *Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel Against the Queen?* (1871; 1872, 2nd ed.). The long book ultimately boils down to a short answer to his titular question: yes, Muslims are *bound in conscience* – they are obligated by their religion and, vitally, their hereditary make up – to rebel. The first paragraphs of his first chapter prove as much:

While the more fanatical Musalmans have thus engaged in overt sedition, the whole Muhammadan community has been openly deliberating upon their obligation to rebel.

Hunter 1872: 10

The entire community is implicated here: the “fanatical Muslims” were seditious, while “the whole Muhammadan community” overtly discussed revolution. Hunter did not discuss the possibility that subjects of any empire might rebel, nor did he contextualize Muslims within a wider landscape of rebellious South Asians – as we know, the 1857 Rebellion was not a rebellion of Muslims, but included a multitude of castes, classes, and religio-ethnic or religio-racial actors. But despite all this, Hunter only worried about Muslim subjects. Throughout his well-read and widely available (through multiple editions) *Indian Musalmans*, he argued, as he did in its introduction, that Muslims uniquely posited a threat to Britain. This wasn’t only the “fanatics,” he implies and outright states that what in today’s parlance might be so-called moderate or liberal Muslims, too, were *obligated* to rebel. Hunter concluded that *all* Muslims were bound by laws beyond the pale of British authority. And he did so within the frameworks of racial logics: any given historical example, textual reference, commentary, speech – these could be and should be applied to *all* Muslims. For Hunter, being Muslim was fact enough to predict behavior, like the propensity towards rebellion.

But Hunter – or any singular author – does not write alone, nor could Hunter – or, again, any singular author – be singularly responsible for broad processes, like racialization or minoritization. Hunter’s writing exists as an example of what was possible to think, write, and argue in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which tells us that the racial logics necessary to *think* that all Muslims can be understood in one way was part of how Hunter’s world operated. But Hunter also capitalized on this thinking, pushed it forward, clarified it in South Asia, and found “facts” with which to support this overarching logic. Hunter, in other words, participated in, and also furthered, the discourse that racialized Muslims in South Asia and, later, beyond. People – largely men – seeking to engage his work, even to refute it, therefore needed to participate in this racial logic, as well.

This is exactly what we see when we read Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s rejoinder to Hunter’s popular, bombastic work. Khan, a famous Muslim modernist and well-known British loyalist, was also a critic of British rule. He wrote *A Review of Dr Hunter’s Indian Musalmans* (1872) and, in it, dissected Hunter’s anti-Muslim claims, almost one by one. Khan was clear that what Hunter was doing was generalizing, troublingly so, and then applying these generalizations as if they applied to all Muslims: Khan argued that though Hunter “expressly states” he was only writing about “Bengal Mahomedans,” Hunter’s work on the whole “gives us the general feeling of Mahomedans through out India” (Khan 1872: 7). We might – and I have – suggested that

this *feeling* Khan perceives is that of racialization: the collapsing of all Muslims into a homogeneity within the particular framework of race.

But Khan, despite launching a defense, is forced to work within this framework. Regardless of how well he defends Muslims, destroys Hunter's argument, comes with receipts, and names the real dangers of Hunter's proposed solutions (which included educating Muslim children away from their parents, an imperial and racial logic deployed in many places that is tantamount to cultural genocide), Khan cannot escape the framework of racialization. Even as he struggles against it, he is tacitly supporting it: when he claims Muslims are not inherently bound to rebel, when he suggests that Muslim texts cannot be read to support what Hunter claims, when he frames Muslims as a collective, he, however unwittingly, is caught in the trap of colonial modernity. He, too, in other words, posits Muslims as a cogent whole, he just disagrees with how that cogent whole is portrayed by Hunter.

Racial logic should seem circular. It is a system of power where one side crudely and imperfectly defines the terms of engagement, and the other sides are left to play a game with ever-changing rules. Escaping such a hegemony is complicated, if it can be done at all – having been made legible within a system that legally, financially, socially defines within racialized parameters makes it hard to “undo” that work. Thus, Hunter is simultaneously a product of his moment, where racial logic and scientific racism is at the fore, *and* he pushes that narrative along, further entrenching Islam and Muslims within hereditary, prognostic, totalizing terms. Khan, too, is a product of this moment, participating in it even as he suffers under racialized frameworks, even as he vociferously argues against this system.

These authors are just one way to get at how the Rebellion served to racialize and minoritize Muslims. However, despite the Rebellion's crucial rupture in the depiction and conceptualization of Muslims in India, rendering Muslims a political minority and a racialized group did not and could not occur overnight. Rather, the acts of remembering and retelling the events of 1857–58 created a narrative in which Muslims became *both* minoritized and racialized. In other words, making Muslims a racialized minority is related to the processes of memory and memorialization, the solidification of a popular and academic narrative of the Rebellion that came to have specific and essentialized characterizations of the lead actors (Muslims, Hindus, and Britons alike). In this example, we may be able to pinpoint the Rebellion as the cataclysmic moment for such a shift, but the writing that comes from the decades following 1857 makes this moment both palpable and ubiquitous. Defining Muslims as a minority – and a dangerous, racialized one at that – was a key goal of some authors and officials, but it was also a process that took many hands and much time. We will see a similar connection between history, memory, and narrative in the case of Uyghurs in China, below.

The Rebellion is but one example of racialization and minoritization, with lingering effects. It is far too simplistic to say that this event creates the cauldron in which today's South Asian religious nationalisms are brewed, but it is nevertheless important to recognize where antecedents occur. The ways that Muslims found themselves minoritized mattered for how Muslims imagined themselves as part of the new state formations, first under the British and later as independence and anti-imperial movements gained traction and came to fruition. The racialization of Muslims and Hindus – with inherent, prognostic, and inescapable qualities – mattered for how groups responded to British rule, attempted to craft self-definitions within those characterizations, or struggled against them. The ways that the Rebellion serves as a marker for racialization and minoritization does not mean it is singular: these are processes that take many examples, incidents, events, laws, social shifts to produce and reproduce. However, these processes helped configure a South Asian milieu that understands Hindus as uniquely distinct from Muslims, and Muslims as inherently violent and untrustworthy; we cannot

underestimate the effect of these processes upon both historical and contemporary politics, identities, and practices.

I have used the Rebellion as an example to tether theories of racialization and minoritization, but these processes play out in other locations and at other times, for Muslims in other parts of Asia. Let us turn to other examples to further tie these theories to concrete examples.

Ongoing history: Racialization and minoritization in China

I began this essay with an anecdote in which my students play into notions of a racialized Islam simply by not believing that Muslims do, in fact, live in Asia in extremely large numbers. Their assumption that Muslims are from the Middle East and that the Middle East is the true home of Islam tells us how Islam has been tied to a place, an ethnicity, a language, and how Muslims beyond that pale are derivative, problematic. One student, as I said earlier, even went as far as to announce that I was trolling them – there had never been Muslims in China.

Of course, there are Muslims in China. And today, many of those Muslims, particularly those of Uighur ethnicity, face incredible persecution, oppression, and ethnic cleansing. I would be remiss to talk about racialization and minoritization for Muslims in Asia without mentioning this dire, horrifying situation.

Muslims and Islam are neither new to China, having arrived in the seventh century, nor negligible in size: there are approximately 27 million Muslims living in China (CIA 2020). Islam and Muslims established mosques, communities, and ways of being in this early period, even if they often lived in segregated communities, apart from other Chinese ethnic groups, namely the Han Chinese majority (Steinhardt 2015; Petersen 2018; see also Steinhardt in this volume). But, after the brutal successes of Genghis Khan ushered in a period of lasting, relative peace across the Asian continent, Muslim influence and prestige also grew. Muslims found themselves part of the imperial apparatus through forced relocation, military campaigns, marriage, and trade. During the eighteenth century, however, we see a shift in Muslims' places within Chinese society. By the nineteenth century, Muslim groups clashed with Qing rulers (r. 1644–1911) and were violently suppressed (Lipman 1998; Atwill 2005).

At the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China was famously divided – by scholars – into 56 ethnic groups. Ten of these are recognized as Muslim minorities, including Uyghurs, a group central to how we may continue to see racialization and minoritization at work for Muslims in Asia (e.g., Mullaney 2011; Thum 2014; Roberts 2020).

The relationship of Muslims to the new state has, itself, varied; during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969), religion across the country was locked down and highly regulated. During this time, as historian Kelly A. Hammond succinctly writes:

In the first years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Muslims enjoyed relative religious freedom. However, during the chaotic early years of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1969, mosques were defaced, copies of the Quran were destroyed, Muslims were prohibited from going on the religious pilgrimage of hajj and expressions of all religious beliefs were banned by the Communist Red Guards

Hammond 2019

Even though after the Cultural Revolution religion – including Islam, of course – found itself better tolerated in China and by Chinese law, after 9/11, we see a global scrutiny and application of racialization of Islam. China, too, was not immune.

As cultural anthropologist Sean R. Roberts effectively argues, the so-called global war on terror has been deployed in China against Uyghurs, an officially recognized ethnic group subject to “cultural genocide” (2020: 18). Uyghurs are a Turkic-speaking ethnic minority regionally situated in western China, in the region perhaps best known in the West as part of the Silk Road, nearest the borders of contemporary nation-states of Russia, China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. As historian Rian Thum has brilliantly shown, Uyghurs themselves see their historical inheritances as manifold, diverse, and complex, even while Uyghurs situate themselves as indigenous to the lands they inhabit. Where Thum suggests that the complex self-historicization of Uyghurs in the twentieth century helps situate their uncomfortable relationship to China, Roberts suggests that belonging in China for Uyghurs is best understood through the lens of coloniality (Roberts 2020: 23). Roberts elucidates the problems of global and local: while a post-9/11 global narrative about Muslims as terrorists, as uniquely and fundamentally loyal to no state, the Uyghurs are simultaneously subject to Chinese histories and narratives – histories that vary from the histories Uyghurs tell about themselves (Thum 2014). In other words, the persecution of Uyghurs exists within a global framework of racialization and minoritization of *all* Muslims while, at the same time, it reflects the histories and politics of Uyghurs in their Chinese context, specifically (Roberts 2020: 21–62).

It matters that some scholars see Uyghurs’ relationship to China as colonial, even if they exist within that state (e.g., Oidtmann 2018; Thum et al. 2018; Anand 2019; Roberts 2020) because, as we saw above, the logics of minoritization and racialization are products of colonial modernity. When we see a similar style of governance, if not precisely the same, or an echo – we can then apply the theories we have developed to this new situation. Internal colonialism is not a new concept, to be clear; it is one most theoretically developed in places like North America, with clear histories of colonization, racialization, and minoritization (e.g., Casanova 1965; Blauner 1969; Goldstein 2014; Johnson 2015: 88).

The narrative of internal colonization is also important because it helps establish what is a critical element of the Uyghur story – namely, whether or not they are indigenous to what is now China. The Chinese government adamantly claims that this is *not* the case, and there are legal, social, and political ramifications to this claim, chief among them the possibility of protection from the state and recognition as “legitimate” inhabitants of the land. This narrative is also important because it is one place we can observe the power of memory and history within the processes of racialization and minoritization. The stories Uyghurs tell about themselves, as Thum argues, are at odds with those told about them, particularly those that come from the state (2014).

Further, the framing of China having internally colonized minorities, like Uyghurs, is important because it helps us see the connection between the colonial logics of racialization and minoritization, even as they play out within this distinctive historical and political landscape. Unlike many other nations, China has an official list, as mentioned above, of minorities, ethnicities, and races; these are *legally* defined and codified in addition to the myriad ways they are enforced socially and culturally. These categorizations happen within historical and cultural contexts that are, of course, unique to China. As categories were developed, Chinese Muslims found themselves at a nexus of Turkic and Islamic movements for visibility, autonomy, and control of one’s historical framework, particularly, as historian David Brophy points out, in the early twentieth century, as the Ottoman Empire declined and as Russia also experienced war and shifts in its national structures (2016). But beyond ethnic distinctions, race is also crucial here, in two primary ways.

First, in the early twentieth century in China, “the republic declared the Muslims to be one of the nation’s five constituent races (along with the Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and

Chinese), and promised a new era of ‘five races in harmony’ (*wuzu gonghe*)” (Brophy 2016: 114). Muslims in China, therefore, were both classified along ethnic lines (e.g., Hui, Uyghur, Kazakh, Donxiang, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Salar, Tajik, Bonan, and Tatar) and racial ones (e.g., Muslim).

Second, following Cemil Aydin, as European imperialists conquered much of the world’s Muslim population, “the Muslim World” as an idea came into being. He writes:

...the Muslim world arrived with imperial globalization and its concomitant ordering of humanity by race. The racialization of Islam was bound up with its transformation into a universal and uniform religious tradition, a force in international politics, and a distinct object in a discourse of civilization.

Aydin 2017: 3

Taken together – China’s racial classification of “Muslim” and the “Muslim world” as a feature of coloniality globally – we can see how Chinese Muslims come to be racialized within local iterations of race and global notions of Islam.

For Uyghurs, as the twentieth century went on, this meant being seen by China as not properly part of the state, as not original or authentic inhabitants, and as a threat, much as we saw in post-Rebellion South Asia. It also meant being seen by Muslims *outside* of Inner Asia as part of “the Muslim World,” albeit in myriad ways (e.g., Brophy 2016; Hammond 2020). The danger in this racialization and minoritization – the being labeled an ethnic minority and a racial identity that is both living *in* China and not properly *of* China – has had terrifying consequences.

As many are no doubt aware, Uyghurs are experiencing what many have variously called repression (Maizland 2020) ethnic cleansing (Catholic News Agency 2020), cultural genocide (Serhan 2020), and genocide, with no qualifier (Smith Finley 2020). Uyghurs have been relocated into internment and concentration camps; Uyghur women have been forced to marry Han Chinese men³; Uyghur children have been separated from their parents; Uyghur men, women, and children have been sent to re-education camps; forced to eat pork; renounce their religion; denied religious materials, including Qur’ans; have seen their mosques demolished (Roberts 2020). All of this has been justified through the language of security: Uyghurs, it is claimed, pose a threat to the state *as* Muslims, since Muslims are inherently, uniquely, prognostically susceptible to violence and terrorism (cf. Roberts 2020; Hammond 2020: 228).

The Chinese state, here, capitalizes on internal histories and senses of belonging – Uyghurs are not *newly* categorized as a religious minority or one of the official races (that is notably among the list as *not* Chinese). At the same time, the Chinese state capitalizes on global patterns and logics. Specifically, the post-9/11 intensification of racialized logics about Muslims: Muslims, in this historical period, are a threat everywhere and to every state. China also is part of patterns of minoritization: in nation-states where Muslims are a minority, we have seen a dizzying influx of anti-Muslim and Islamophobic laws, policies, campaigns, and personalized violence (cf. Ayoub and Beydoun 2017; Zempi 2019; El-Enany 2020; Wilson and Shastri 2020; Elfenbein 2021). Racialization and minoritization are not merely theoretical tools in our toolbox with which to think about Islam. They have real, ongoing, and – and as we’ve seen in this case – alarming consequences.

Conclusion: Racialization and minoritization of Muslims in Asia

This short chapter cannot pretend to do justice to all the ways that theories of race and belonging, and the processes of racialization and minoritization, act upon Muslims in Asia. Certainly, we

have barely scratched the surface of the complicating factors, historical conditions, regional nuance, and ongoing shifts. I chose two case studies – the 1857 Rebellion in South Asia and the Uyghur community in China – that spoke to my own expertise and the pressing nature of these academic notions. We could have easily spent time with Rohingya, another religio-racial ethnicity in Myanmar; we could have talked about ongoing and increasing Islamophobia in places like Thailand, where racialized logics and legal minoritization are more and more visible; we might have thought through Indonesia's role as the most populous Muslim nation in the world, its push for meaningful relationships with normative, powerful, Arab and Arabic-speaking Muslim-majority nations, and how those relationships might reflect the ways that Indonesians are racialized within global settings to be anything but normative. These processes, in other words, are not limited to the examples I gave even as I have been limited by time, space, and expertise.

I started this chapter with an anecdote about my classroom, and I said that most of my students did not locate Islam within Asia – they assumed it was Middle Eastern, Arab, Arabic-speaking, but not Asian. This, too, is a racialized understanding of Islam: Muslims, in this common framing, are inherently one thing, and that thing isn't Asian, broadly or specifically. However, this misconception is not limited to undergraduate students; the lack of understanding about Islam in Asia broadly is evidence of how pernicious the racialization and minoritization of Muslims really is, at all levels. If Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation in the world, why is it that we assume Muslims are not from Asia? Why are classes at universities few and far between on Islam in Asia? When we take classes about Chinese history, are Muslims part of that story? Are they absent? When we teach classes about the religions of Asia, does Islam make it to the syllabus, or do we focus on “real,” “authentic,” and “properly” Asian religions, like Buddhism, Hinduism, or Shinto?

Asking rhetorical questions of the reader is meant to provoke you – that very reader – to think about where, how, and if Islam in Asia has appeared in your learning, life, or experience. If it has not, then you have first-hand experience with the racialization of Islam: it is *not* Asian, and can be excised from knowledge systems about Asia. Similarly, if this is the case, you have witnessed the minoritization of Asian Islam: it is not powerful enough, not meritorious enough to appear in curriculum across disciplines. This is despite the fact that most Muslims in the world are Asian – the demography does not dictate curricula, hiring practices, textbooks, common knowledge. Concepts like minoritization and racialization may seem lofty or for egghead professors only. But history, contemporary politics, the lives of Muslims, and the overwhelming data show that the processes of racialization and minoritization have real effects on Muslims, Asians, and anyone else, really, trying to make sense of their world. Knowing about these processes helps identify them – so we can see our world more clearly.

Notes

- 1 Defining jihad and tracing the historical contexts of those definitions is far afield from this piece. Suffice it to say that “jihad is holy war” is far too simplistic and a rather slanted understanding of the term. See, as examples: Abdulaziz Sachedina, “The Development of Jihad in Islamic Revelation and History,” in *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Traditions*, ed. J. T. Johnson and J. Kelsay (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990), 35–50; Sohail H. Hashmi, “Jihad,” *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. 1., ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 377–379; Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihād and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

- 2 Judith Weisenfeld uses this term to describe the interplay between religion and race in the United States. But this formation – the imbricated ways in which religion and race cannot be separated – is transportable to the South Asian case, as well. See: *New World a-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).
- 3 “Forced to marry” implies a different kind of genocidal set of crimes: forcible rape with the assumed goal of “mixed race” procreation. I hesitate to use this euphemism but it is factually accurate, however misleading and troublingly obtuse, about what is happening to Uyghur women and girls.

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3

THE FIVE PILLARS AND INDONESIA'S MUSICAL SOUNDSCAPE

Anne K. Rasmussen

The five pillars of Islam (*arkan al-Islam*) constitute the scaffold that comes to stand for the religion. Whether learned by students from texts and lectures, through acculturation among children in a Muslim family, or by passive consumers of a documentary film on the History Channel, this metonymic pentagon might remain a stark and lifeless skeleton comprising five essential points to remember about Islam – the pillars. Or, the scaffold may become increasingly dressed and decorated with detail: experience, memory, history, context, and multisensorial nuance – all depending on a person's relationship to the religion as it is observed, learned, experienced, lived, and practiced.¹ More than merely abstract principles of the religion that is followed by the 1.8 billion Muslims in the global *umma* (about a quarter of the world's population), each pillars requires action on the part of the individual and interaction among that individual in a social context. In this chapter I show the ways in which such actions are both performative and musical, and how this performance of Islam nourishes and inspires a rich but understudied and undercelebrated world of music in Islamic Southeast Asia.

My goals in this chapter are three. First, I want to bust a myth of incompatibility that plagues orientalist and oversimplified assumptions about “music and Islam,” by inviting readers and listeners into the dynamic soundscape of religious life in Southeast Asia (see al-Faruqi 1985; Neubauer 2001; Shiloah 1997). Second, like other chapters in this volume, I redress the marginalization of Southeast Asia in considerations of Islam in contemporary Western academia and politics. After all, as Robert Rozeznal reminds us, “with more than 250 million Muslim citizens, Islamic Southeast Asia alone is roughly equal in size to all the Arabic-speaking countries combined” (2019: 5). Finally, bringing *seni Musik Islam* (or Islamic musical arts) from the periphery to the mainstream of ethnomusicological inquiry constitutes a kind of scholarly activism that speaks to inherited epistemologies in my own field (see Weintraub 2014). This chapter shows, through a discussion of the musical and performative aspects of expressive, religious culture in Southeast Asia, the many ways in which Islam is essentially “a pan-Asian religion” (Rozeznal 2019: 5) with Southeast Asia as a part of “a cohesive space of Islamized interaction” (Formichi 2020: 6) where for millennia people have “actively contributed to [both] devotional practice and knowledge production” (Formichi 2020: 3).

I use the five pillars of Islam as an organizing device that pulls back the curtain on the resonant praxis of religion. Audio-visual recordings referenced in the text provide illustrations

to the performances I describe. The chapter also attends to the transmission of such resonant praxis, paying close attention to the media technologies, from the oral traditions of the voice and the adoption of “Islamic” musical instruments to material recording and broadcast technologies, to include wax cylinders, records, video compact discs and mp3 files along with radio, television, film, and the internet. Over the long twentieth century and into the present, all of these technologies have worked to facilitate an experience of the global Muslim community, or *umma*.

Finally, to add a third element to this analysis, I ask the reader to keep in mind the place of religious performance in the biosphere, among a variety of peoples and communities: colonial officers; coastal villagers; courts of the interior; students at religious boarding schools; musicians and artists; religious leaders; government agencies; transregional organizations; and, importantly for my work, not only men and boys, but women and girls.

Methodology

My experience with Southeast Asian Islam derives primarily from Indonesia where I have been ethnographer, professor, student, musician, performer, mother, wife, friend, colleague, advocate, collaborator, house guest, and tourist. It began in 1989 when my ears were first christened with the contrapuntal tapestry of voices, both solo and collective, that worked each evening and in multiple open-air locales to accomplish recitations of the entire Qur’an, *khatam al-Qur’an*, before the end of the fasting month, Ramadan (Rasmussen 2010a:81–83). The research that began in earnest in 1996 (Rasmussen 2001), continues to the present with daily messages from teachers, friends, and colleagues via WhatsApp (referred to in Bahasa Indonesia with its initials WA, pronounced Way Ahhh) and seminars on Zoom. While my subject position has never been as co-religionist, when in Indonesia I participate regularly in ritual events and educational contexts that involve religious content. As a musician (singer, instrumentalist, and ensemble director) and a scholar of Arab music and culture, my role has been as performer, presenter, and collaborator while also being a student at the intersection of religion, art, gender, and politics as experienced in embedded and embodied public, aesthetic practice. My other research, teaching, and performance projects concern Arab music and culture both in the North America diaspora and, significantly for this chapter, in the Arabian Gulf nation of Oman (Rasmussen 2012). While my projects in the Arabian world and diaspora, and Indonesia, occupy different trajectories, they nevertheless inform one another (Rasmussen 2016b), particularly since I have endeavored to put Indonesian Islamic musical arts (*seni music Islam*) on the map in a world that overwhelmingly privileges a monolithic, Arab-centered, reduction of Islam.

I pursue musical practice as a method for ethnographic “fieldwork” and collaboration, sometimes putting myself “out there” in ways that have required the courage to be vulnerable. Ronald Lukens-Bull remarks of his relationships in East Java, “Ethnographers are professional border crossers. The whole enterprise is based on the ability to balance our roles as observers and outsiders and as participant and insiders” (2007: 177). Commenting on vulnerability, Lukens-Bull continues, “the researcher shows respect for the people he or she is working with by doing what they do, especially when asked to join them” (2007: 182). Performing in the field, in any of the roles mentioned above, has sometimes resulted in uncomfortable moments, and unanticipated spaces; junctures of friction where learning and exchange are the most productive.

Anthropologists and historians of Islam in Indonesia have been primarily concerned with articulations of culture and society through language-based discourse, and also by reading the discursive registers of material culture, including architecture, artifacts, spices, plants, and

sartorial traditions and their movement around the world (see for example works by Bianchi 2004; Bowen 1996; Hefner 2014; Ho 2006; Howell 2007; Laffan 2011; Tagliacozzo 2013; 2008; 2005; and Woodward 1996). Formichi notes the paucity of surviving texts in tropical Asia, a point that underscores the need for “reading” material culture and what it tells us about human interaction (Formichi 2020: 31). A dynamic exchange of goods around the Indian Ocean and between the littoral communities of East Africa, the Arabian Gulf, the Indian subcontinent, maritime Southeast Asia and settlements rimming the China sea is evinced for example in the rediscovery of the Intan shipwreck c. 10,000 (Hall 2016; Wade 2009), in the traces of a multi-religious, cohort of maritime merchants (Gordon 2008), or in the development of a sophisticated science of astral navigation among the premier boat builders of what is present day Oman (Sheriff and Ho 2014). Anthropologists of humanly organized sound can contribute another filament to this tapestry of Indian Ocean history, one based on expressive culture, and more specifically, the performance of language. From supplication to song, language performance in Arabic is an essential discipline of the traditions and transmissions of a Muslim habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; Frishkopf 2013; 2018; Hirschkind 2004; 2009).

Colonial hearings of Southeast Asia and the many Islams of *Islam Nusantara*

It is the soundprint of the human voice, performing primarily in Arabic, that divides quotidian time, signals the progression of the seasons, marks the cycle of human development, and unites the long *durée* of history, connecting the *umma* in a common pursuit of hearing, learning, and knowing. Early travelers to the region along with colonial officers, whose long-term assignments offered them the luxury of Orientalist immersion characteristic of the era, appreciated the prominence of sound praxis as it met with the new technologies of the day, namely sound recording, photography, and later, film. For example, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) whose legacy peppers scholarship on the Malay world, made over 300 wax cylinder recordings in Jakarta (then Batavia) and Mecca. Jan Just Witkam writes on the legal opinions that were levied on this then, new technology:

When the Dutch Islamicist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) published an article in 1900 on Muslim legal opinion on the recording of sound in general and of the recitation of the Quran in particular, he was treating an issue that was then very modern. At the time Snouck Hurgronje was based in Batavia (Jakarta), where he held the influential post of official adviser to the Dutch colonial government on Arabian and Islamic affairs. It was his job, among other duties, to monitor new trends in the thinking of Indonesian Muslims, to report about these to the Dutch authorities, and to write official dispatches containing advice.

Witkam 2018: 809

The fact that Snouck Hurgronje not only reported on the thinking of Indonesian Muslims but also experimented for himself with the new available and portable sound recording technology attests to his perception of the importance of the experience, transmission, and capture of the sound event in Muslim culture. Witkam also profiles, Sayyid Uthman, an Indonesian of Hadrami origin, who issued a comprehensive fatwa on the use of phonography in 1899 comprising a list of rhetorical questions on the commodification of Islamic language performance. That a legal opinion (*fatwa*) on the recording of Quranic verses was issued as early as 1899 tells us that modern mass media and its ability to capture sound was a subject of

curiosity and concern (Witkam 2018:810). Flash forward to the advent of film, and we see the experiments of Dutch colonial officers to ethnographically capture the process of the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, as in the case of *The Great Mecca Feast* by Georg Eduard Albert Krugers (1928). Finally, the work of prolific Dutch scholar Jaap Kunst (18191–1960) to document the music of Indonesia and the Malay world, enjoyed a career that was very much a byproduct of the colonial era and its motivations.

Like those colonial hearings of Islam in Southeast Asia, this chapter attends to the human voice and its union with physical movement and somatic entrainment in gendered bodies. The material culture of musical instruments, and the roots and routes of rhythms, lyrics, and melodies, extend that story in ways that expand the voyeuristic ambitions of early scholars, to acknowledge instead the collaborative process essential to contemporary ethnography. This attention to sounded praxis enriches and propels the emergent literature on Islam in Southeast Asia, as a corrective to the representations of Muslim culture that are confined to the greater Middle East, that organize knowledge according to a “myth of continents,” and that treat music and creative performance with skepticism and restraint, or not at all (see Lewis and Wigen 1997). What is the reason for treating Southeast Asia as the periphery? After all, the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asia’s Muslims live in Indonesia where roughly 85% of the country’s 245 million people profess Islam. Malaysia and Brunei with are also Muslim majority countries, and smaller Muslim populations live in Timor-Leste, Singapore, Southern Thailand, and the Southern Philippines. Even in music studies, a surfeit of literature on courtly arts, and “authentic” folk traditions of earlier pre-Islamic Hindu Buddhist times, suggests that scholars of music were heirs to an implicit two-pronged bias: first, the notion that the authority of Islam was located outside of Indonesia (in the Arab Middle East); and second, that Islam was an impediment or worse yet, a force destructive to the arts (Rasmussen 2016a; Weintraub 2014: 354, see also Byl and Sykes 2020). Inheritors of a colonialist mindset that places Islam outside of Asia, ethnomusicologists have had much to do in documenting the complex relationship among such forces as religion, community, gender, politics, and the arts.

Many of the scenes of Indonesia that I describe extend to the rest of island and mainland Southeast Asia, and some of them to Muslim communities globally; however, I do not pretend to represent all of the ways in which Islam as a framework for life, inspires and challenges the artistic and musical manifestations of religion in the entire region. For a more complete picture of the musical cultures of Islamic Asia, readers are encouraged to explore the scholarship of Harris (2014; 2020) on Uyghur Islam, Matusky and Tan (2004), Sarkissian, and Nor on Malaysia, Santos on the Philippines (1998), and Lee on Singapore (1999). Kartomi (2011; 2012), Ishiguro (2018; 2019), and Raseuki (2017) write on Sumatra and Aceh, specifically, and the volume by Harnish and Rasmussen (2011) collects contemporary English-language scholarship on music and Islam in Indonesia while dissertations by Agha and Kinzer (2017) add to the literature.

To catalogue the musical arts of *Islam Nusantara* – referring to the many ideologies, practices, and organizations of the Indonesian archipelago – is already a colossal undertaking; however, such a project is one that has both intellectual and activist objectives. In addition to making a case for Islam as an Asian religion to students and scholars, representations of Islamic-inspired creativity (*seni bernafaskan Islam*) provide a counterpoint to the caterwauling brawl of the Islamist hardliners whose contributions to the soundscape are aggressively noisy and hostile. Islamic musical arts, and especially the voices of women and minorities within that heterogenous chorus, are both remedy and proof that cries of populism and intolerance fueled by Islam *keras* or hard Islam, are indeed the voices of a minority (Arifianto 2020; Rasmussen 2021).

Poet, author, religious guide, and entertainer, Emha Ainun Nadjib, leader of the now-legendary music group Kiai Kanjeng, like the majority of Indonesian leaders, promotes a tolerant and middle path, or Islam *wasatiyyah*. He marveled, during one of our public conversations, at the endless variety of palm-frond weaving techniques for *ketoprak*, a specialty of rice, cooked in woven leaf pouches that can be an offering for ancestral spirits or enjoyed during *lebaran*, the post Ramadan holiday. Like many food traditions *ketoprak* invites speculation regarding the overlapping and integrated cultures and histories of Indonesian Islam that encompass past traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism under its cloak. Pak Emha, also known as Cak Nun, used the metaphor of *janur*, or palm frond weaving techniques for *ketoprak*, to emphasize the multiplicity of integrated singing and musical styles that co-exist in the culture of Indonesian Islam, a topic that I have returned to in my conversations with him again and again since January 2000 when we first met.²

Resonant praxis through the five pillars

As people from the Islamized regions of the Arab world and Indian Ocean travelled down the West coast of India and through the straits of Malacca and Makassar and back again, they paused, submitting to the weather patterns of the Monsoon winds, on the shores of Island Southeast Asia where and when they transmitted the *arkan al-Islam* through repeated ways of being in the world that were witnessed, demonstrated, shared, imitated, absorbed, and embodied (Formichi 2020: 30, see also Sheriff 2010). The practices of language performance, for example, intoning prayers in Arabic, and meaningful movement, for example, the *raqa'at* (or prostrations) of prayer, constitute aspects of Islamic *adab*, a kind of embodied comportment that conveys and reinforces knowledge about religion and spirituality and faith itself. Such physical discipline, including kinesthetically embodied postures and gestures of humbleness and submission, *khushu'*, are demonstrated, learned, and practiced, and together, constitute an aspect of Muslim citizenship (see for example, Agha 2019: 2; Khabir 2016; Rasmussen 2019; Rozehnal 2019). Much of this pious proficiency, because it is sounded praxis, manifests in the atmosphere, like bells or sirens, and is thus witnessed without choice by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Observing "Islam in the Atmosphere" is a multisensorial experience where the amplified audial signals of religion combine with the Asian aesthetic of "busy noisiness" also known as *ramai*, to produce a public aural/oral experience of Islam (Rasmussen 2010a: Chapter 3). "Southeast Asia, at least in my experience, is 'pro-noise,' and in the contemporary soundscape this pro-noise policy has been bolstered by amplification technology" (Rasmussen 2010a: 44–45). Consequently, echo-location and the ability to hear, recognize, learn, and to eventually understand human activity through aural cognition is a central aspect of Islam in Southeast Asia. I reflect,

Hearing Islam in Indonesia is not an option; it is a certainty. Architecture in Indonesia, even in Jakarta [the capital city of more than 10 million], is porous, and the sonic dimension of the built environment is interpenetrating. Neighborhoods are acoustically accessible and penetrable. And because even the smallest group will amplify their activities, pushing them into the public space, sometimes with a great deal of distortion, my access to or at least observation of innumerable contexts was enabled through orality.

Rasmussen 2017: 201

These resonant praxes – the call to prayer, the recitation of the Qur'an, the Sufi-tinged rituals of *wirid* and *zikir*, sermons broadcast from the neighborhood mosque, commercial jingles that

comprise the soundtrack of Islamic capitalism, or what Bart Barendregt, in telling the story of the popular music, *nasyid*, calls a “funky but shariah” consumerist lifestyle – are all sonic traces of Islam in (Southeast) Asia (2012: 315). Let’s listen in.

The *Shahada*, *Salat*, and other recitations

The first pillar to be revisited with an ear towards how these metaphorical obelisks contribute to the soundscape is the *shahada*. This confession of faith is articulated in the call to prayer, the *adhan*, which summons the faithful to prayer (*salat*), the second pillar. It is broadcast five times a day (*fajr*, dawn; *shuhur*, midday; *‘asr*, afternoon; *maghrib*, sunset; *‘isha*, night) from every mosque, and over radio and television, on alarm clocks, smart watches and cell phones, and the sound-systems of the public sphere, from air-conditioned malls to the corner store. Throughout the Islamicate world, the *adhan* is declared in full text, with four of its five lines repeated in a declamatory, heightened frame. The call signals a time outside of the normal course of the day and is always in Arabic, which when sounded in Southeast Asia, is a language that carries prestige, power, and even a sense of mystery. Experienced everyday throughout one’s lifespan, this call puts bodies into action, reaction, and reception.

Audio-Visual Clip 1: Mr. Zainul Abidin Lubis performs the call to prayer, Medan, Sumatra, Spring 2017.³

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar	God is great, God is great
Ashshadu an la ilaha illa Allah (×2)	I testify that there is no God but God (×2)
Ashshadu anna Muhammad rasul Allah (×2)	I testify that Muhammad is the prophet of God
Hayya ‘ala salah (×2)	Come to prayer (×2)
Hayya ‘ala falah (×2)	Come to salvation (×2)
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar	God is great, God is great
La ilaha illa Allah	There is no Go but God

Ideally, the *adhan* is “sung” in stylized improvisatory lines within a system of Arabic musical modes called *maqamat* (Ar. plural). This melodic system, also common to the recitation of the Qur’an, informs the entirety of Islamic musical arts worldwide. Numerous sources validate the appreciation of a beautiful voice, one that attracts the faithful with the combined splendor of sound, language, and meaning. While an amateur may bark out his call with little sentience for melody, intonation, range, or decoration, the disciplined and talented *muadhdhan* will demonstrate all of these musical qualities to the utmost.

Consider the vocalization of the *adhan* as demonstrated for me by Pak (Mr.) Zainul Abidin Lubis of Medan, North Sumatra. At this moment, he is driving me to the Medan airport, and I am filming from the back seat. Pak Zainul is a reciter (Qari’), teacher and judge of Quranic recitation whom I met in 2004 at a national five-day Qur’an competition in Palangka Raya, Kalimantan (see Rasmussen 2010a: Chapter 4). He is also a leader of IPQOH (*Ikatan Persaudaraan Qari’ / Qari’ah dan Hafiz / Hafizah*) – The Association (literally, siblinghood) of Male and Female Reciters and Male and Female Memorizers of the Qur’an, a group that is renowned for its performances and recordings of Islamic song genres, *tawashih*, *qasidah*, and *sholawat* (Rasmussen 2016a; 2010b). As an expert vocalist and teacher of *tajwid* (Ar.) the system

of rules that governs the sectioning, pronunciation, and rhythm of the recited Qur'an, and of *lagu al-Qur'an* (Ind. melodies of the Qur'an), I knew that Pak Zainul would render an exquisite *adhan*. So, I requested to film him from up close.

Audio-Visual Clip 2: Hearing the call to prayer in context. Recording by the author.⁴

As prelude and postlude to the *adhan*, the melodious chanting of the Qur'an (*tilawa-t-al-Qur'an*) is likely to be heard, either recited live by the *muadhdhan* and/or his companions from the mosque, through its amplification system or, broadcast from some sort of phonogram, be it a record, a cassette, a compact disc, or more likely today, an mp3 file from a cell phone. The pervasive soundprint of the recited Qur'an in Indonesia cannot be overestimated. Recitation frames countless events, both ritual and civic, and it is practiced, by women and men, and girls and boys, alone and in groups. That women recite, recite well, recite with authority, and recite throughout the public sphere, is one of the distinguishing features of Southeast Asian Islam (see van Doorn-Harder 2006; Gade 2004; Rasmussen 2001; 2009; 2010a). I submit that the kinesthetic memories of individual hearers of recitation infuse meaning into all moments that include the recited Qur'an and the many artistic genres, both representational and aural, that reference it.

The singing of religious songs, *sholawat*, may also bookend the call to prayer suggesting to the intrepid auditor that there is a dynamic continuum between speech and song and between ritual and para-ritual language performance. Singing *sholawat* in community, whether performative or participatory, is another extraordinarily pervasive aspect of religious social life in Indonesia and the contexts for this broad category of *seni music Islam* are many. Arabic song texts from the Islamic literary canon, are collected in volumes or now available as "apps" accessible on your phone. They come from various collections of Arabic poetry, for example the poetry of al-Barzanji (1716–1764) about the Prophet Muhammad and his life, the *Qasidah Burdah* (the legendary tale of the Prophet's cloak by the sufi mystic, Imam al-Busari, 1212–1296), and *Mawlid Simtu Dror* by al-Habshi (1843–1915) (see Agha 2019). These texts become *sholawat* when sung to Arab melodies from the repertoires of traditional and urban music in the Arab world, or to melodies which have been "borrowed" from non-religious, popular music from the Arab world (see Rasmussen, 2005; 2021). The repertoire of *sholawat* also extends to newly composed texts that might refer to the 99 names of God or impart and explain verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith (collections of the Prophet's sayings). Not surprisingly, because Arabic is not the lingua franca of Indonesia, religious songs can combine Arabic and the national language, or local languages like Javanese or Sundanese, for example. Even a cursory YouTube search for Indonesian *sholawat* gives the listener an idea of the range of styles in this catch-all category of religious song.

Ramadan: fasting and feasting

Following the profession of faith articulated through the ritual of prayer, the third pillar of our scaffold is *sawm*, the dawn to dusk fasting that is practiced by all who are able during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. While the directive is to abstain during the daylight hours from food, drink, and other indulgences, like sex and music, this abstinence is offset by evenings that are filled with special meals and snacks, visitation, ritual, and recreation that invites abundant "language performance" (Frishkopf 2013; 2018) and very often, music as well. Over the course of the entire month of Ramadan, multi-day competitions in Quranic recitation transpire, musical extravaganzas by Islamic artists and pop stars alike are produced, and recordings, created for the holidays, play on in shopping malls and hotel lobbies. Neighborhoods and commercial venues alike host the community for the breaking of the fast,

buka puasa (Ind.) at dusk. Professional *qari'* and *qari'ah* are busy with extra “gigs” that range from reciting for civic events, to leading communal extended prayers, called *sholat tarawih*, to teaching Quranic short courses, to judging competitions in Quranic recitation (Gade 2004; Rasmussen 2001; 2010a; 2016; 2009).

Admittedly for some involved in the myriad worlds of music in Southeast Asia, Ramadan is a rupture in the rhythms of creation and production; wedding musicians for example have to take a break, and hotels and restaurants that cater to locals, ex-pats, and travelers suspend their live entertainment. But as these kinds of music are paused, others kick into high gear during the fasting month. As Ramadan progresses and the culminating *Eid al-Fitri* draws nigh, it is not at all uncommon to hear lively programs involving music in the public sphere and over broadcast media. Awash with both religious and nationalist or civic overtones, such programs are complimented by festivals and competitions scheduled during the afternoons and on weekends. For the ethnomusicologist interested in local music, Ramadan is an exciting time indeed when what I have called “the festivalization of religion” is most apparent.

A key moment of the day is *sahur*, the meal that proceeds the *fajr* or dawn prayer. As Muslims in Java begin preparing the meal at around 2.00 a.m., traditionally *patrol*, as a practice, and later as an ensemble and a musical genre, functions to wake people up in the wee hours of the morning. This tradition has become aestheticized and celebrated through formal competitions during Ramadan of this “wake-up” music (*lomba patrol*, or *patrol* competitions). The event I describe was held at the Malang Town Square Mall, a place that Google Maps labels as “a large and lively enclosed shopping center,” and was one of several *lomba patrol* that occurred in the city of Malang, East Java during Ramadan 2017. About 20 different musical ensembles comprised of teenagers and young adults – both male and female – each performed a medley of “religious wake-up music” to a panel of judges and hundreds of spectators and passers-by. Meant to be processional, the ensembles are made up of instruments that can be worn, or carried, (or played in the bed of a pickup truck). Bamboo rattles, xylophones, and drums come from a multi-species category of ideophone called *kentongan*. *Kentongan* are slit drums, made from bamboo (or wood) tubes of various lengths and diameters and with a slit carved down the middle. *Kentongan* are central to a great many of the archipelago’s musical ensembles, perhaps in part because the technologies of their construction are infinitely accessible. *Kentongan*, can function as sirens and signals, as is the case with the giant *ketongan* that hang on the veranda of the mosque and played to signal the times for prayer, yet another unique aspect of performative Islam in Indonesia. And *kentongan* are also tunable, meaning that they can produce precise pitches by themselves and in interlocking cooperation with others – as in a handbell chorus – or as a set as it the case with the hanging *ketongan* of the *anklung* or the bamboo xylophone.

Audio-Visual Clip 3: The *patrol* group, Trisula, warms up outside the Malang City Center Mall before their turn to perform in the *patrol* competition or *lomba patrol*. Video by the author. Used by permission.⁵

Leo Zainy, professor and well-known musician and thespian from Universitas Negeri, Malang, the city’s large public university, who introduced *patrol* to me during Ramadan 2017, describes it this way. I have translated and distilled our conversation below:

Patrol is a Javanese tradition – a specialty of East Java in fact. Its function since ancient times is to wake Muslims up before the *sahur* and also to provide information or announcements with the signal of the *kentongan*. The word *patrol* comes from the English “to patrol” and in the past people in the village always took their turn to patrol and maintain security in the night. If there was danger they would sound an alarm



Figure 3.1 Poster for a competition (*lomba*) in Ramadan “wake-up” music, or *patrol*. Note that the person depicted is wearing traditional Javanese Muslim dress, the *sarong* and *peci* (cap), is beating a *kentongan* with a stick and proclaiming “*sahur sahur*,” the word for the Ramadan pre-dawn breakfast. Courtesy of Leo Zainy.

with the *ketongan*. *Patrol* developed into a dynamic music culture and the *kentongan* were combined with other musical instruments by enthusiastic youth who now accompany their *sholawat* songs with the clamorous patrol ensemble. To encourage their creativity, competitions were developed. Groups are judged on a number of criteria, including: creativity; arrangement; originality; mastery of instruments; vocals; harmonization; synchrony; and costumes. If the competition is processional, groups will be judged on the decoration of their floats (*odong-odong*) as well.

Leo Zainy pers. comm. 2017 and December 17, 2020

Ramadan's festivities culminate in the *Eid al-Fitri* when the fasting month comes to a close with fireworks, parades, and celebratory performance, all of it *bernafakan Islam*, infused with the spirit or literally, breath (*nafas*) of religion. Big cities empty like water down a drain while



Figure 3.2 The group Trisula warms up before their turn on the competition stage at Malang Town Square. Instruments R to L: xylophone (*calung*), snare drum, cymbal, *anklung*, *ketongan* (held by musician seated facing the camera) plastic water jug, bass drum (*jidor*). Photo by Anne K. Rasmussen.

roads, busses, trains, and planes rumble at full capacity, during the traditional return home, called *mudik*. Following the quiet week of *lebaran* (Ind.) at home with extended family, daily schedules return to normal; however, house parties and receptions are held by families and public institutions, like schools and businesses with the purpose of celebrating the successful Ramadan month. Called *halal bi halal*, this is the time when Indonesians ask forgiveness of their loved ones, friends, colleagues, and employees, with the unique Indonesian expression *mohon maaf latir dan batin*, “please forgive my wrongdoings, both physical or outward (*lahir*) and inner, spiritual, of the soul (*batin*).” Altogether, the month of Ramadan, *Eid al-Fitri* and post-Ramadan gatherings provide nearly infinite contexts for performing Islam through musical means.

***Zakat* Tax**

The fourth pillar of the Islamic scaffold is *zakat*, the obligatory but voluntarily submitted tax of roughly 2.5% of a household’s net worth, usually levied during Ramadan. Along with extraordinary rites of exchange that bring lights and music to the shopping malls, and rites of conspicuous consumption to expanding waistlines, *zakat* is celebrated with public displays of generosity promoting an awareness that all lives matter in the great diversity of communities in need and communities of difference among Indonesia’s 17,000 islands, 300 languages and ethnic groups, and even the five official religions recognized in Pancasila, the country’s binding



Figure 3.3 A Ramadan card from the public relations manager for the National Zakat Agency (*Badan Zakat Nasional*) Yudhiarma and his family. “Happy Idul Fitri 1441 H [Hijri calendar, aka 2020]. Let us hope that the struggle of Ramadhan, fasting, and Zakat will make us tougher and always grateful throughout our lives. Forgive me, body and soul.” Used by permission.

national creed of five philosophical principles (see Clendinning 2020). The ritual exchange of wealth afforded by the *zakat* is yet another opportunity for the creative display of religiosity.

Hajj Pilgrimage

The fifth player in the quintet of Islamic scaffolding is the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Religious pilgrimage to Mecca happens in two ways, the *hajj*, which takes place during *Dhu al-Hijjah*, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar, and the lesser pilgrimage, or ‘*umra*, which can happen at any time during the rest of the year. Indonesia sends more pilgrims than any other country to Saudi Arabia for the *hajj*, about 220,000 annually, and many more for the ‘*umra*, and this provides huge stimulus to a transnational *hajj* economy, which many argue is rife with graft and corruption. Pilgrimage is just one of the reasons for travel between the Arab world and

Southeast Asia, and along the maritime corridors of time, spiritual and economic quest have traveled hand in glove.

As the most significant catalyst for cultural interpenetration, trade and travel around the Indian Ocean, and between the Arab world and Southeast Asia, not to mention the Indian subcontinent, Africa to the West, and China and beyond to the east, the *hajj* has facilitated the flow of language, ideology, and philosophies of spirituality, but also of folklore and foodways, material technologies like Chinese porcelain or musical instruments from the overland Silk Road, and knowledge systems like, song repertoires and singing techniques, or boat building and mosque construction. As mentioned above, Snouck Hurgronje also spent substantial time in Mecca, where he became extremely knowledgeable about Islam as a theological, legal, and social phenomenon. Although they reflect the mindset of his day, his writings are valuable because of his keen insight and observation of Islamic customs. Snouck Hurgronje also left behind more than 300 wax-cylinder recordings that he made in Mecca and in Batavia. Dutch ethnomusicologists Anne van Oostrum (2021) and Wim van Zanten (2017) have studied the collection, now archived at the University of Leiden, to conclude that great diversity is represented in the collection which includes the voices of women, along with recreational and sacred repertoires. I submit that the music preserved in the grooves of those cylinders could be echoes of performance practices that were already in circulation for decades, if not millennia. And, because these recordings were made at the most significant of humanitarian crossroads, we can assume that, off the record too, there was sharing and blending of musical styles and practices.

Another early audio-visual document is *Mekka Feest*, (1928), the 72-minute silent film by Georg Eduard Albert Krugers. The film follows a group of Indonesian pilgrims and their journey to Mecca. According to film scholar Sandeep Ray,

At a time when cameras were generally not permitted and non-Muslims were not allowed to enter the sacred zones, it was an unusual document, one that would become popular in years to come – Indonesians would frequently watch *Mekka-Feest* at movie theaters. A closely filmed, ethnographically rich account of a phenomenon that even in the 1920s saw about thirty to fifty thousand pilgrims voyaging from Java and Sumatra, the document has unfortunately remained in the slow lane of history.

Ray 2020

Thinking about the *hajj* as both a crossroads of travelers who arrived for pilgrimage and scholarship, as well as a melting pot of merchants from all over the overland and maritime Silk Road, helps us to understand the migration of instrument technologies. While usually celebrated for its bronze ensembles of instruments, collectively called *gamelan*, Indonesia along with the rest of Southeast Asia is replete with musical instruments that originated in Arab lands or traveled along the overland and maritime Silk Road. Called by many names, these instrument technologies include wooden double-reed aerophones (*tetepret*, *selompret*, *preret*, *tarompet*, *serunai*, *seruni*, and so forth), frame drums (*rebana*, *terbana*, *terbang*, and so forth), the *rebab* (two-stringed bowed lute), the *bedhug* barrel drum, and the *gambus* lute. Because these instruments originate in West and Central Asia and Islamic areas rimming the Indian Ocean, their timbres and associated playing techniques index Muslim-ness, whether heard in a mass gathering for the singing of *sholawat*, or in the country's most widespread popular music, *dangdut*. Furthermore, the depth of performing traditions associated with these Islamicate-world instruments confirm Indonesia's place in music of the Muslim world. Such musical genres and styles, too many to describe here, are often labeled by the instrument names themselves. For example, the musical genre-names *gambus*, *hajir marawis*, *terbang jidor*, and *qasidah rebana* all reference the names of the instruments used in the

ensemble (Rasmussen 2010a: Chapter 5; 2019); other styles take their names from the lexicon of musical globalization, the archetypal example being *akapela* (from the Italian, *a cappella*), also known as *nasyid* (Barendregt 2012; 2011; 2006; Rasmussen 2010b; Sarkissian 2005).

While serious attention to Islamic music in Indonesia has only begun to bear fruit in the past dozen or so years, it is important to note that scholars of Indonesia have long remarked on the musical imprints of religion. The Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst (1891–1960), originator of the term “ethno-musicology” and a scholar who devoted his lifetime of study to the music of Indonesia, includes in his work numerous instruments that, because of their connection to the Arab world, are associated with Islam. In a compilation of his various publications (Kunst 1994), about one third of his photographs of instruments are those that traveled to Indonesian from the Islamized Arab world, Middle East, and South Asia to include several varieties of *rebana* and *marwas* (drums), *gambus* (plucked lute), *serunai* (oboe), *rebab* (bowed lute), and *double clarinets* (like the Arab *mijwiz*). His photos also include dancers performing the Arab/Malay dance *zapin*, a dance commonly seen in performative and recreational contexts today (Kunst 1994: 174, 176, 182, 190, 194, 218; on *zapin*, see works by Berg 2011 and Nor 1993, see also Farmer 1929).

We also hear representations of *gambus*, the musical style and ensemble that takes the name of the instrument, *gambus* (now, synonymous with the Arab lute, the ‘*ud*’) in the early commercial recording industry recorded by talent scouts from international companies such as *His Master's Voice* and *Odeon* during the first part of the twentieth century. Sooi Beng Tan counts several titles of *gambus* and the related genre *orkes melayu*, among the recordings in a transnational 78 rpm recording industry that captured the sounds of the emergent popular styles of music shared among present-day Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (Tan 1996).⁶

What's music got to do with it?

One exciting aspect of Islam in the “land below the winds” as Agnes Keith described the region, is the extraordinary innovative performativity that characterizes Islamic life (1939). The efflorescence of Muslim music in Southeast Asia takes on added interest when viewed against the proscriptions and confusion that surround music and musicians in Muslim cultures worldwide. Any conversation around music turns first to the Qur'an and *sunna* for guidance on the permissibility of music. Finding no explicit prohibition of music in the authoritative texts, this prerequisite literature review should then be followed by the opinions of various authorities. An important distinction to make is that between music (in Arabic, *musiqā*) which is separate from the category, singing (*ghina*) which is in turn distinguished from chanting, or recitation (*tilawa*). Thus, things that sound “musical” to the outsider, whether they be a scholar, journalist, or tourist, and that may be described and even transcribed into musical notation as “music” according to certain epistemologies, may not even actually be “music” at all in local or Arabic-informed dialects, including those in Muslim Indonesia.

Among Indonesians in the business of religion, music is a “marked” category, as is the case with the Arabic concept *musiqā*, that generally means song with the accompaniment of musical instruments; however, there can be a lot of flow between and among the categories of music, song, and recitation. Just as Islam Nusantara is pro-noise, it is also pro-music and pro-dance, and in this context, women's voices and bodies are welcome. To what can we attribute this tolerant stance? The *wali sanga*!

In short, a series of oral and written texts ascribe the initial Javanese conversions to nine saints, the *wali sanga*, most of whom were non-Javanese mystical evangelists who

performed magical acts and used the performing arts to popularize Islam in Java and throughout various areas of the country during the later Majapahit and early Demak years. The importance of these Sufi-oriented saints cannot be overstated. Their tombs are shrines, festivals have been established in their names, a variety of ethnic groups claim ancestral or cultural lineage with individual *wali*, and they are very much a part of current discourse on Islam in Indonesia.

Harnish and Rasmussen 2011: 23

Principal among the artistic media that helped to spread the gospel of Islam was *wayang*, the comprehensive performance art that encompasses story-telling, communication of current events, comedy, history, and moral teaching through dramas involving puppetry, singing, musical accompaniment by gamelan, visual arts, and when human actors are involved, dance. All of this emerges at the will of the *dhalang*, the puppet master, who in addition to telling a story through narration, recitation, dialogue, and song, conveys news, humor, advice, along with moral and spiritual philosophy (see Sumarsam 2011). *Gamelan sekaten*, an ancient ensemble, played on the *maulid*, or birthday of the Prophet Muhammad also finds its origins with the nine saints who served as “advisors to the first Sultan of Demak, the 16th century Islamic kingdom” (Sumarsam 1981: 54). The story of the *wali sanga* and particularly one *wali*, Saint Sunan Kalijaga, is very much alive today, operating as a kind of origin myth for Indonesian Islam and the arts. “It is repeated and engaged imaginatively and efficaciously to the advantage of a vision and version of Islam that is tolerant, varied, expressed through and inspiring to the arts, and uniquely Indonesian” (Rasmussen forthcoming 2022).

Women’s agency in the Muslim musical soundscape

Many of the characteristics of Islam Nusantara come together in Nasida Ria, a musical group of women established in Java in 1975, and which is now cultivating its fourth generation of female performers. Their music, which can be classified as *qasidah moderen*, draws from the genres, *gambus*, *rebana*, *music melayu*, and Indonesian pop. Here is an excerpt from our group interview in Spring 2017, in the city of Semarang.⁷

At first, before 1975, we were encouraged to practice recitation (*mengaji*). The goal was the art of reciting the Qur’an (*seni baca al Qur’an*) and Haji Muhammad Zain was our coach. After we were finished with our recitation we would sing with *rebana* (frame drums). It was clear to him that we had good voices. You see, if you can recite you can surely sing but if you can sing that does not necessarily mean you can recite. (*Kalau bisa ngaji, pasti bisa nanyi tetapi kalau bisa nanyi, belum tentu bisa ngaji*). When we were young we won at Qur’an contests and learned the Arabic modes (*maqamat*). Haji Muhammad Zain, he was a judge of the MTQ Nasional (Qur’an competition). He helped us develop. He was talented in the melodies (*lagu*). Really talented. That’s why he encouraged us to sing and play *rebana*. We didn’t use instruments, then just *rebana*. (*Bukan pakai music, pakai terbang saja*). Then after that we were helped by the *wali kota* (the mayor). He helped us get instruments. First the melodica, then the keyboard and the other instruments. [The members of Nasida Riya play guitar, violin, flute, percussion, electronic quarter-tone Arabic tuned keyboard, and of course, they all sing.] When we became a group, Haji Muhammad Zain had the idea for the name: NASIDA RIA – which means joyful (*ria*) *nasid* (religious song). And our name has 9 letters for the 9 original members of the band. We also worked with Abu Hali Haidar and



Figure 3.4 The *qasida moderen* group, Nasida Ria performs at the Dugderan Festival in Semarang, Spring 2017. Hj. Nadhiroh, violin; Hj. Hamidah, mandolin; Hj. Afuwah, drums/kendang; Hj. Rien Jamain, vocalist and emcee; Titik Mukaromah, guitar; Siti Romna keyboard. Photo by Anne K. Rasmussen.

Bukhori Masuri. They composed the lyrics but many of the tunes were borrowed from popular Arabic songs. The perspective of Nasida Ria is wide regarding the concerns of the world: the environment, global warming, peace, war, the appeal for Palestine, supplication to God for the sins of man, government corruption, social justice, women's rights, and including such contemporary topics as fake news (*berita palsu*).

We went on to discuss their education at the religious boarding school Pondok Pesantren Raudhatul Qur'an, the 35 albums created over their more than 40-year career, their international tours, the many hit songs, the support and patronage they receive from Nadladatul Ulema, the largest Muslim organization in the archipelago, the young generation of Nasida Ria women who go by the name of Azura, and the influence that these women have had on popular culture including on styles of Muslim dress (*busana Muslim*), through their cassette covers, their video clips, and their concerts and now their presence on social media, including Instagram and YouTube. We then moved into their rehearsal space for a jam session in advance of their concert later that evening, a part of the Semarang Festival of Dugderan, a version of the pre-Islamic village cleansing rituals that happen across the archipelago in anticipation of the month of Ramadan. When I asked whether the Islamist hardliners had any effect on their world they were quick to respond: "No. They are only a minority and they don't influence us at all."⁸

Conclusion

Characterized as the “land below the winds,” the Indonesian archipelago has been historically, culturally, meteorologically, and spiritually connected to the ebb and flow of Indian Ocean Islam, beginning as early as the ninth century, when maritime trade and travel from the Arabian Peninsula to the China Sea began. Melodic strains, poetic texts, musical instruments, and cultural rituals, all by-products of the epistemologies and praxis of what eventually became part of a system of global trade, manifest today in one of the richest and most dynamic Muslim musical cultures in the world. Using Indonesia as an example of Islam in Asia, this chapter has invited readers to listen in to the sonic praxis of religious life, with special attention to creation and reception by various individuals and groups including girls and women and transmission via various forms of social practice and mass media. Islamic music, including the chanting of the Qur’an and ritual song, *sholawat*, along with all kinds of popular *seni music Islam* (Islamic musical arts) has only begun to be documented by an international cohort of scholars and celebrated by Indonesians in the context of *Islam Nusantara*, literally, “Islam of the Archipelago,” which for centuries has embraced, tolerance, local tradition, diversity, and the deep roots of these defining characteristics.

Notes

- 1 Recent research has been supported by a Fulbright Fellowship in 2017 and a Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies (2021). As a non-Muslim American, it is not my intention to project or speak for the religious beliefs of Indonesian Muslims. Rather, I submit that *observation*, experience, participation and appreciation of Islamic culture in Indonesia are open to all people who live in and visit the country. *Islam Observed*, is of course the title of one of anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s works on Islamic culture in which the author reveals his observations about the points to the many Islams that co-exist in the Islamicate world (1968, 1976).
- 2 For an example of such conversation see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oubQcdljNJY&t=761s>.
- 3 <https://annekrasmussen.gs.wm.edu/research/islam-in-asia-av-examples>.
- 4 <https://annekrasmussen.gs.wm.edu/research/islam-in-asia-av-examples>.
- 5 <https://annekrasmussen.gs.wm.edu/research/islam-in-asia-av-examples>.
- 6 The comprehensive 78 rpm reissue project, *Longing for the Past: The 78 rpm Era in Southeast Asia* from Dust-to-Digital (2013) includes two recordings of *gambus*, both of them, commercial as opposed to field recordings (as is the case with the wax cylinders of Snouck Hurgronje discussed above) (Gibbs et al. 2013). “Gambos Sri Mahkota Kelantan” recorded by *Odeon* is performed by the singer, Obid with the Special Singapore Malay Orchestra, and “Gambos Ya Omar, recorded in 1911 by *His Master’s Voice* features the singer Salih recording a song for the dance, *zapin*, again in Singapore. (CD D14 and D9 respectively with notes by Sooi Beng Tan). On the instrument and genre, *gambus*, see also works cited by Berg, Capwell, Hilarian, Kinzer, Lambert, Nor, and AlSalhi.
- 7 Nasida Ria is well represented on the internet. See the recent story from BBC News Indonesia, January 3, 2021, on their transition from the era of the cassette to live streaming, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-55504430>.
- 8 “Tidak, mereka hanya kelompok minoritas. Jadi tidak memberikan pengaruh apa-apa kepada kita.” Personal Communication, Rien Jemain, Semarang, Java, Indonesia, April 2017.

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4

ISLAM AND SANSKRITIC *IMAGINAIRES* IN SOUTHERN ASIA

Mount Meru in Arabia

Torsten Tschacher

Arabic and Persian have long held a privileged position in the study of Islam. As the language of the Qur'an, as well as being the transregional language of Muslim scholarship, Arabic's centrality to Islam can hardly be denied. Persian has been more limited in terms of its spread and authority, but as the primary language of Muslim elites from the Balkans to China, it nevertheless carries considerable weight as a language of Muslim discourse. But if we understand Islam primarily in terms of concepts developed in these two languages, what are we to make with the large number of Islamic texts in Asia that were not written in these two languages, and the even larger number of Muslims whose prime idiom of communication has been a language other than Arabic or Persian? As long as these other languages have remained recognizable in terms of the terminology, aesthetics, and rhetoric strategies employed by them, as exemplified by modern Urdu, this has not in any way challenged the centrality of Arabic and Persian for understanding the history of Islam and Muslims. But a large corpus of texts exists written by Muslims in various Asian languages, which convey Islamic meanings through the vocabulary, imagery, narratives, and discursive strategies that are also found with non-Islamic texts. In contrast to those texts and discourses that framed Islam in terms recognizable to the "Islamicate" aesthetics, terminologies, and patterns of argumentation found in Arabic and Persian, scholarship has found it far more difficult to grapple with Islamic discourses formulated in and according to the standards of various Asian languages.

In this chapter, my aim is to present an overview of recent approaches and possible future avenues for research on Islamic discourse and literature in Asian languages by taking an explicitly comparative approach. Rather than relating an individual language-tradition to the wider body of Arabic and Persian Islamic discourse, focusing on what would separate Asian-language discourse from Middle Eastern languages, I analyze what unites these languages in their responses to Islam. For this purpose, the chapter investigates those languages of southern Asia that have been characterized by a long engagement with Sanskrit and connected knowledge-forms. This focus on the Sanskritic serves several purposes: it allows us to compare not only the terminologies, but also poetics and *imaginaires* (borrowing from Steven Collins 1998) of engagements with Islam in southern Asia, as well as to reassess the socio-religious context of Islamic discourse

in the region. After briefly surveying the approaches to such “Sanskritic Islamic discourse” taken by past scholarship, I then move on to the question of terminology, to assess the benefits as well as limits of translation theory as an interpretive framework. In a third section, I discuss the role of Sanskritic *imaginaires* and poetics in Islamic discourse in southern Asia; finally, I turn to the question of community and social context. By decentering from Arabic and Persian as “source” languages of Islamic discourse, and focusing on the patterns of meaning-making in Asian “vernaculars” instead, I suggest ways of engaging with Islamic discourse in Asia without reproducing the binaries of a Middle Eastern center versus an Asian margin in the history of Islam.

From syncretism to translation

An earlier generation of scholarship has tended to frame the intrusion of Asian elements into Islamic texts and discourse as “syncretism” (cf. e.g., Geertz 1968; Roy 1983; Schimmel 1982). The concept of “syncretism,” with its assumption of “pure,” “unalloyed” entities getting “fused” or “mixed,” has been subjected to a thorough critique (cf. Robison 2018; Stewart and Ernst 2003) and justly fallen out of favor with most scholars. Among the more productive manners that emerged to rethink the expression of Islam in Asian idioms in the wake of that critique has been the concept of “translation.” First propounded in a seminal article by Tony Stewart (2001), conceiving of the more unusual aspects of Islamic discourse, practice, and material culture in Asia in terms of a “translation” of Islam into local idioms has been fruitfully applied to a large variety of contexts, and beyond the limits of translation between languages to the field of material cultures. That Asian Islam was an “Islam Translated,” as the title of Ronit Ricci’s (2011) groundbreaking comparative study puts it, has greatly improved both our understanding and our appreciation of the processes involved in formulating Islamic discourse in Asian languages; discourses that, far from being the preserve of the “ignorant masses,” demonstrate the thoughtfulness and knowledge of the actors involved. In the works of Ronit Ricci (2011) or Finbarr Barry Flood (2009), translation has become a larger metaphor for processes of cultural change and transculturation. At the same time, however, studying Islam in Asia through the lens of translation comes along with associated problems of its own.

Perhaps the greatest danger in the model is to understand translation in a popular sense as involving an “original,” in comparison to which the “translation” is deficient. If one assumes that Islam is translated from a “core” idiom into a “peripheral” one, the direction of translation determines the respective value of the outcome. As such, Islam “translated” can only have a local, “vernacular” importance, whereas only cosmopolitan idioms such as Arabic can convey Islam universally. As far as Islam is concerned, the idiom from which it is translated – an Arabic text, a Quranic concept – remains prior to the translated idiom. In other terms, Islam in translation requires elucidation in terms of the idiom from which it is translated, whereas the translation is of no importance in understanding the “original,” thereby rendering it peripheral.

Scholars like Flood (2009: 182), drawing on Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, have emphasized that such an understanding of “translation” as derivative is flawed: there exists really no stable “original” against which the fidelity of the “translation” can be measured. But how far can the notion of “translation” be extended? It is not simply a question of weakening the explicatory power of the concept by over-metaphorizing it (cf. Flood 2009: 8–9). An important part of the problem lies in the fact that despite scholarly disclaimers, scholarly practice seems to reflect a different truth. Theories of translation have been employed precisely in contexts like India or Java where local Islam has long been under suspicion of “deviating” from Islam’s “original” message. Despite Flood’s (2009: 8) assertion that translation “occurs not only

between but within cultures,” there seems to have been little demand for translation theory to explain the specificities of Islam in sixteenth-century Egypt or twentieth-century Saudi Arabia, thereby reinforcing the centrality of Arabic and the Arabic lands. Put otherwise: as long as not all expression of Islam is treated as “translation,” the essentialist specter of an “original Islam” hovers over scholarship, while if all Islam were treated as “translation,” the analytical power of the concept would diminish greatly.

A verse from the Javanese poem *Sĕrat Cabolek* demonstrates, that Asian Muslims were themselves clearly able to delink Islam from the idiom in which it was conveyed:

Yet the sense of the *kawi* books
Bima Suci and *Arjunawiwāha*,
which contain many allusions,
exhausts the essence of mystical knowledge (*ngelmu*),
if the interpreter is precise.
Just like the *kawi Rāmāyaṇa*,
these are (works of) Sufism (*tĕsawuf*).

Sĕrat Cabolek 8.6; translated in Ricklefs 1998:
149, slightly modified

As Merle Ricklefs put it succinctly, it is not as if *Sĕrat Cabolek* claimed that the poems from Java’s pre-Islamic past “are as good as Islamic works, or better than Islamic works...*they are Islamic works*” (Ricklefs 1998: 150–151; emphasis added). We might add: what they express is *not merely a “translation” of Islam, it is Islam*, and the meanings Muslims derived from them are as vital in understanding the particular ways in which Asian Muslims related themselves to the revelation of Islam (cf. Ahmed 2016: 405) as are their engagements with Arabic or Persian texts. There can, of course, be no question of a unity of “Asian” engagements with Islam, in as far as “Asia” itself is a European construct. However, one particular formation, or perhaps better, a cluster of engagements, does stand out as being of particular importance both to a substantial number of Asian Muslims as well as to scholarly attempts at making sense of “Islam in Asia.” Most commonly, this formation has been identified in religious terms, as “Hinduism” and/or “Buddhism,” highly problematic labels in so far as they immediately signal a seeming contrast and even opposition to “Islam.” David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (2000: 2–3) have suggested the term “Indic” as an equivalent to Marshall Hodgson’s “Islamicate” to avoid the narrow conceptualization of this formation as “religious.” The term would indeed be useful, had it not recently been highjacked by Hindu-nationalist organizations to refer precisely to Indian religious formations in contradistinction to Islam or Christianity.

Instead, what I aim to highlight here is not the “religious” background of these engagements with Islam, but their relationship to the “knowledge forms” (Pollock 2006: 221) of Sanskrit. This characterization may appear no less problematic than the concepts of “Hindu-Buddhist” or “Indic”: not only are there no “Islamic” texts in Sanskrit (with a few noteworthy exceptions, such as the *Sekasubhodaya* or the *Allopaniṣad* (cf. Sen 1963; Truschke 2016: 40–41), but also, with regard to the so-called “vernaculars” of southern Asia, scholars have often been at pains to emphasize the independent trajectories of these vernaculars from Sanskrit.¹ While these are valid objections, highlighting the importance of the “Sanskritic” aspects of Islamic discourse in southern Asia is justified for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is precisely Sanskrit-derived vocabulary in Islamic texts that has provided the greatest sense of unease for scholars of these texts due to the common association of Sanskrit with Hinduism. Secondly, there can be little doubt that most of the languages of southern Asia have a long history of engagement with Sanskrit texts,

poetics, and *imaginaires*. Thirdly, drawing attention to Sanskritic discourses serves the purpose of highlighting a long tradition of discursive sophistication in the idioms of southern Asia long before they came into contact with Arabic and Persian, and thus avoids presuming simplistic hierarchies of linguistic superposition (cf. Pollock 2006: 328–329; Tschacher 2019b: 89). Finally, the fact that the Sanskritic horizon is common to many idioms used by Muslims in southern Asia makes a comparative angle all the more meaningful.

It is telling that despite the large number of languages in southern Asia that drew on Sanskritic diction and poetics to express Islam, there have been very few attempts to engage with the topic comparatively. Ronit Ricci's (2011) seminal work takes a comparative angle, but it is directed at comparing different engagements with the same Arabic story, rather than at similarities between the "target languages." While the "translation"-paradigm has been important in order to challenge the charge of "deviation" or "ignorance of Islam" levelled against Asian Islamic discourses, it does not engage sufficiently with the intellectual heritage beyond the Islamic that Muslim authors and audiences tapped into when composing, transmitting, and debating Islamic texts in the "vernacular." My aim is to suggest in broad outlines the necessity to consider not only the desire to "translate Islam," but also the manner in which Islam was used to make sense of terms, images, narratives, and practices that people across southern Asia had long considered to be "true."

Terminologies and translation

In a way, it all begins with words. Much of the unease that both academic researchers and ordinary Muslims in southern Asia have experienced when studying earlier vernacular Muslim discourse from the region, resulted from seeing the Prophet Muhammad referred to as an *avatāra*, the Qur'an as *veda*, a Sufi master as *guru*, or paradise as *svarga*. These local terminologies of Islam cover the whole field of Islamic religious vocabularies, including theology (e.g. Tamil *vētam* [< Sanskrit *veda*], "scripture"; Tschacher 2014: 199), prophetology (Bengali *avatāra*, "prophet"; d'Hubert 2018: 36), cosmology and cosmogony (Javanese *swarga*, "paradise"; Ricklefs 2006: 22), anthropology (Javanese *sukma*, "soul"; Ricklefs 2006: 22), law (Bengali *paradāra*, "adultery"; d'Hubert 2018: 41), and ritual (Tamil *vaṇakkam*, "worship"; Tschacher 2014: 207 n. 10).

Since the nineteenth century, such Sanskritic vocabulary has become understood as the hallmark of a specifically "Hindu" terminology, and its appearance in Muslim discourse has therefore required explanation. At its most basic, the answer given to the question raised by Sanskritic and other "non-Islamic" vocabulary in an Islamic text has changed little since the nineteenth century (cf. e.g. Irani 2011: 188–206; Ricci 2011: 248; Ricklefs 2006: 21–24; Stewart 2001): Islam was a new and unfamiliar religion, and to make it comprehensible to the people of southern Asia, believers and non-believers alike had to go "in search of equivalence" (Stewart 2001: 260) between incomprehensible Arabic and Persian words and the familiar terminologies of Hindu–Buddhist knowledge systems. What has changed has been the evaluation of that process: an earlier generation of scholars perceived such equivalences and identifications in terms of "deviation" and, possibly, the "ignorance" of the "masses" among Asian Muslims, thereby associating the presence of local vocabulary, Sanskrit-derived and otherwise, either with low social status or with deliberate heterodoxy (cf. e.g., Robinson 1983; Schimmel 1982: 17–19; also, Eaton 1993: 291–297; Roy 1983: 6–7). More recent approaches have highlighted the degree to which the creators of Islamic discourse in Asian languages acted as translators and aimed at finding proper equivalences, words that could convey as much of an Arabic term as possible.

The approach to understanding the presence of Sanskritic terms and imageries in Islamic texts as instances of translation is inseparably connected with the name of Tony Stewart. In a seminal article published in 2001, Stewart critiqued the notion of “syncretism” that had until then been the prime conceptual framework to understand Islamic discourse in Bengali, drawing instead on translation theory to posit a more cogent and agential model. According to Stewart, Sanskritic terms and imagery in Bengali Islamic texts were the result of an attempt by Muslim authors to convey new and unfamiliar thoughts in the local idiom:

In order to express their ways of imagining the world, we must assume that these Muslim authors did not ‘borrow’ terms but, in a more intellectually astute process, sought the closest ‘terms of equivalence’ in order to approximate the ideas they wanted to express.

Stewart 2001: 273

However, he warned that such translations should not be understood as formal sets of total equivalents, but rather, drawing on translation theorist Eugene Nida, as “dynamic equivalence”: while formal equivalence between two idioms is in most instances impossible, translation means to search for the closest possible analogue to a concept in the target language, a process that necessarily involves the production of incongruences, as the existing semantic and discursive field surrounding the target term is unlikely to be congruent with the source term in all aspects. Stewart takes as an example the use of the term *avatāra* in Bengali poetry to translate the Arabic concept of *nabī* or “prophet.” While the Islamic understanding of “inspired guidance” connected to *nabī* is also present in the Vaishnava term *avatāra*, and therefore permits translation of *nabī* as *avatāra*, the translation also had unintended consequences. The fit between the two terms is never perfect, and therefore subject to further and possibly divergent developments (Stewart 2001: 280–282).

Stewart’s approach has been nothing short of revolutionary, and has inspired a number of further studies that have extended the concept of translation from the concern with terms and vocabulary to a more general theory of conversion and transculturation (cf. Flood 2009; Irani 2011; Ricci 2011). But the application of translation theory to the question of Islamic terminology is not without its own pitfalls (cf. Tschacher 2014). Many of these pitfalls are paradoxically connected to one of the most commonly asserted aspects of the translation of Islamic terms in Asia, namely that through translation, the texts, ideas, and languages “were ‘converted’ into new forms of themselves” (Ricci 2011: 271), making the unfamiliar familiar. The binary of familiarity/unfamiliarity threatens to reproduce precisely the very dichotomy – of “original,” unfamiliar Arabic *versus* familiar-but-not-quite-equivalent Sanskritic terms – that scholars like Flood have tried to avoid. This is particularly obvious when we consider a phenomenon found in nearly every Islamic text in an Asian language: the concomitant presence of both Arabic and non-Arabic terms referring to Islamic concepts.

If the translation of an Arabic word is motivated by the unfamiliarity of the term it refers to, what are we to do with the presence of the untranslated Arabic in the same text? Generally, scholars have tended to see the presence of an Arabic term as an acknowledgment of the untranslatability of that term, reflecting both its sacredness and its newness. Ricci (2011: 165), for example, claims that “in all three languages [Javanese, Malay, and Tamil] certain [Arabic] words defied translation,” and that the reason for this was, likely, that the concepts behind these words were considered so novel as to remain untranslatable. Other scholars have similarly emphasized the novelty of certain Arabic concepts in the southern Asian world, pointing not only to the novelty of ideas, but also at strictures against translations of the Qur’an, for fear of

misrepresenting central Islamic concepts (cf. e.g., Eaton 1993: 293–294; Irani 2011: 176–183; Stewart 2001). But as Ricci similarly admits, this does not explain the “inconsistency” (Ricci 2011: 169) that certain words were translated and others were not. Are there, therefore, other ways to approach the question of words, translation, and (un)familiarity?

There are two aspects that need to be interrogated when approaching this question. Firstly, it is dangerous to assume that a word defies translation or is considered untranslatable just because a loanword is used in a particular instance. The terms Ricci discusses as untranslatables, for example, are all “religious” terms with substantial doctrinal load in Arabic – *munāfiq* (“hypocrite”), *kāfir* (“infidel”), *nabī* (“prophet”). Yet the *Āyiramacalā* (Vaṇṇapparimalappulavar 1984), Ricci’s Tamil sample text, also contains Arabic words referring to what would seem to be completely translatable concepts, e.g., *mawt* (“death,” *Āyiramacalā* Kaṭavuḷvāḷttu 6) or *mas’ala* (“question,” *Āyiramacalā* 55). These “secular” Arabic words point to a particular problem in the terminology debate, namely that the debate is religiously overdetermined. On closer inspection, it turns out that many of the allegedly “untranslatable” Arabic terms were actually translated. Yet their translation has not been noticed, because the word(s) by which they are translated are not specifically connected to any Asian “religion,” and therefore seem innocuous. In the *Āyiramacalā*, for example, the Arabic word *ḍīn* (Tamil *tīṇ*) is translated by the Tamil word *neṛi*, “path, principle” (cf. e.g., the phrase *iculām neṛi*, “path of Islam” = *ḍīn al-islām*, in *Āyiramacalā* 43, 1044). As the concept of *neṛi* is not the sole preserve of a particular religion, its use in a Tamil text as a translation of an important Arabic theological term is easily overlooked.

The second aspect we need to consider is connected to the way words were evaluated by authors and audiences. Modern scholarship tends to assume that “Asian” words in a Muslim text would have been evaluated as “familiar” (and chosen by authors for that reason), while Arabic or Persian words would have been noted as “foreign,” and were therefore similarly chosen to signal the difference and alienness of Islam. But it is difficult to ascertain whether such identifications of languages and systems of thought across binaries, in which Asian language equals Hinduism/Buddhism equals familiarity, while Arabic equals Islam equals unfamiliarity, were actually made by Asian Muslims. For Bengal, scholarship has long highlighted the anxiety expressed by authors for writing about Islam in Bengali (cf. Eaton 1993: 278–279; Irani 2011: 176–183; Roy 1983: 68–69). But in other cases, such as Javanese, Malay, or Tamil, it is rather the ease with which authors drew on different languages that has been noted (Ricci 2011: 168; Ricklefs 2006: 21–23; Shulman 2002: 106). Consider another example from the *Āyiramacalā*. The text frequently employs the word *napi*, [< Arabic *nabī*], to refer to the Prophet, but at times utilizes a curious “translation” for it, *vētāmpar* (e.g. *Āyiramacalā* 55, 1047). The word *vētāmpar* is derived from a Sanskrit compound consisting of *veda* and *amba*, “one who sounds,” giving the meaning “one who voices the Veda.” Yet this Sanskrit term is peculiar to Tamil and Malayalam-speaking Muslims and has no equivalent among Hindus. As far as I can see, it is not contained in any Tamil dictionary (or, in its compounded form, in any Sanskrit dictionary either), making it likely that it was South Indian Muslims themselves who came up with this particular Sanskrit word. Here, the Arabic word seems far more familiar, even to a Tamil audience, than its Tamil translation!

It is in this context that taking a wider angle at the shared background of the written idioms of southern Asia becomes particularly interesting. For example, by drawing on sources composed by both Muslims (Sunni and Ismaili) and non-Muslims (Vaishnava and Buddhist) in Arabic, Sanskrit, and western Indian vernaculars, Sara Cappelletti (2019) demonstrates the resonance of the *avatāra*-concept across putative religious boundaries. But rather than focusing exclusively on the religious aspect of the encounter between Muslim authors and the world of Sanskritic discourse, even more important is to consider forms of knowledge beyond the

religious, to understand the contours of that encounter. One area of knowledge well developed in southern Asia were the interconnected fields of grammar and poetics. To understand the way and purposes to which words were used by local authors, it is instrumental to consider the understandings of language, words, and meaning these authors brought to their works. The situation we are faced with when considering the terminologies of Islamic texts in southern Asia, with their bewildering array of Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and “vernacular” words, is not merely a feature of “religious” poetry. Allison Busch (2010) has similarly observed that patterns of different verbal registers – Arabo-Persian, Sanskritic, vernacular – in Braj Bhasha poetry hardly follow the religious or cultural boundaries perceived today: a Mughal emperor could be praised in highly Sanskritized vocabulary, while Hindu rulers could in turn be referred to with the “Islamic” epithet *ghāzī*, “righteous warrior.” In the case of Tamil, I have argued that Arabic and Persian had by the thirteenth century become generally accepted as proper sources for vocabulary in a Tamil poem (Tschacher 2019b: 90–94). But by using Arabic words in a Tamil poem, these became, properly speaking, Tamil words, and were integrated into the chains of synonyms consisting of both Tamil and Sanskrit words that made up Tamil poetic diction. Through this move, and quite counterintuitively from the perspective of modern translation theory, Arabic words were understood to mean exactly the same as their Tamil or Sanskrit equivalents. It is thus unsurprising that Islamic Tamil texts show little evidence of considering any word “untranslatable.” On the lexical level, there simply was no “translation” in this system, only a recognition of “synonymity.” Discourses on grammar, poetics, and aesthetics, are therefore more likely to provide us with an understanding of the terminologies of Islam in southern Asia than a focus on “religion” and “familiarity.”

Poetics and *imaginaires*

The importance of Sanskritic poetics and aesthetics in the formulation of Islamic discourse in southern Asia can hardly be overstated, though it is only recently that scholarship has begun to appreciate their importance. In contrast, the preponderance of local imagery in Islamic texts has long been noted: poets described the Arabian countryside in terms of the deep forests and lush rice-fields of Bengal, Java, or the Coromandel Coast, or depicted the pomp and feasting attending to weddings in terms of the marriage traditions of southern Asia (cf. Hijjas 2015; Mukherjee 2015; Narayanan 2000: 82–91; Ricklefs 1998: 79; Roy 1983: 104–108). When it came to explaining this phenomenon, however, scholars have often conveniently fallen back on the conventional notion of familiarizing the unfamiliar (Eaton 1993: 278; Narayanan 2000: 82–91; Roy 1983: 109). What has been noted to a far lesser degree is that such descriptions were conventional (cf. Narayanan 2000: 85; Ricklefs 1998: 79), in the sense that they were not simply familiar and traditional, but that they adhered to rules regarding how to properly describe a country or a wedding in poetry. In other terms, Islamic discourse submitted to the framework established by poetics. In some cases, Muslim poets could directly draw on treatises of aesthetics and poetics written in the local language, as in the case of Tamil (Tschacher 2014: 205–206), while in other cases, no such texts existed. But even then, a keen awareness of both Sanskritic and Arabo-Persian models of poetics is often readily apparent (cf. Braginsky 2004a: Chapter 4; d’Hubert 2018: Chapters 5–7).

However innocuous the descriptions of Bengali sweets served at an Egyptian wedding, or of South Indian paddy fields surrounding Mecca, may seem, the adherence to established poetic conventions has contributed to the impression of “deviance” from Islamic norms in a manner not dissimilar from the use of Sanskrit vocabulary. This becomes particularly clear when this conventionality involved references to cosmological or mythological entities. The list of such

entities appearing in Islamic literature and discourse in southern Asia is long, as is the diversity of context in which they were invoked.

The mystical Mount Meru, located at the center of the earth, may serve as an example. Sometimes, it appears as a “real” location: “He [God] made the heavens and the earth, the mountains Meru, Mandara, and Kailāsa,” the Hindavi-poet Mawlānā Dā’ūd wrote in his *Cāndāyan* in 1379 (*Cāndāyan* 1.2., translated in Behl 2012: 36); there, at the earth’s center, the Prophet himself could encounter the mountain, or it could tremble at the approach of ‘Alī’s horse (cf. Roy 1983: 95; Uwise 1976: 56). At other times, Mount Meru appears as a standard of comparison: the Tamil *Cīṟappurāṇam* (Umaruppulavar 1987) compares the shoulders of the farmers around Mecca to “the Golden Mountain caressed by dark clouds” (*mai taval kaṇakakkiri; Cīṟappurāṇam* 1.2.37, quoted in Uwise 1976: 137, my translation), while two armies appear as large as that mountain in the Avadhi romance *Padmāvat* (Behl 2012: 206). Finally, Mount Meru symbolized the macrocosmic equivalent of a human’s spinal cord: to “focus the mind on the spinal column” (*Jñāna Pradīpa*, translated in Irani 2011: 108), as a seventeenth-century Bengali text put it, was part of gaining spiritual awareness through the yogic exercises practiced by both Hindus and Muslims (cf. Behl 2012: 167–168; Braginsky 2004b: 153; Irani 2011: 106–108).

The appearance of Mount Meru in an Islamic text is as little a sign of “syncretism” or deviance as the presence of “th’Aonian Mount” in *Paradise Lost* 1.15 is an indicator of some sort of Crypto-Paganism on account of John Milton (1968). Yet, much as the reference to the home of the Muses in the work of a decidedly Christian poet gestured to the imagination of alternative divinities, Muslims in southern Asia could not avoid acknowledging spiritual powers that appeared to have no sanction in Quranic lore – nor did many of them even try to avoid it.

Perhaps the most famous example of the integration of Hindu deities into Islamic lore is provided by a seventeenth-century Bengali poem, Saiyad Sultān’s *Nabīvaṃśa*. The *Nabīvaṃśa* presents Krishna as a sort of failed prophet, ambiguously distinguishing between the notions of *nabī* and *avatāra*, while simultaneously associating the two concepts. That the Devil is identified in the same poem with the sage Nārada of Hindu mythology furthermore strengthens the “displacement,” as Richard Eaton has called it, of Bengal’s Hindu divinities by the prophets of Islam (Eaton 1993: 285–290; Irani 2011: Chapter 6; 2016: 399–400; Stewart 2019: 186–187). But not all Muslim authors were as negatively predisposed to Hindu divinities as Saiyad Sultān. In the sixteenth century, the North Indian Sufi ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī penned a Persian treatise, entitled *Ḥaqā’iq-i Hindī*, which endeavored to make sense of Hindavi poetry through the metaphorical imagery of Persian Sufi poetry. While Bilgrāmī does acknowledge that, at times, mentions of Krishna in Hindavi poetry were to be understood as a reference to Satan, more commonly the Hindu deity was to be taken as a metaphor for the Prophet Muhammad (Orsini 2014: 238).

Yet another way of assimilating Hindu supernatural beings into Islamic discourse is encountered in Tamil poetry, where Muslim authors identified the class of divinities known as *tēvar* (< Sanskrit *deva*), a term usually translated into English as “gods,” with the angels of Islam. Ultimately, this permitted Muslim authors to explicitly identify specific angels with specific minor deities of Hindu mythology, such as Isrāfīl, the angel blowing the trumpet on judgment day, with Kāla, deity of time (*Āyiramacalā* 933, cf. Ricci 2011: 111), or ‘Izrā’īl, the angel of death, with Yama, the god of death (*Cīṟappurāṇam* 1.1.10; cf. generally Tschacher 2019b: 93–94). Muslim authors realized the subordinate nature of the minor “gods” of Hindu mythology, and consequently counted them as subordinate spiritual beings like the angels, rather than as rivals of Allah. Similarly, Kidul, often somewhat misleadingly referred to as the “Goddess of the Southern Ocean,” appears in Javanese Islamic discourse as a spirit aiding the cause of

Islam (Ricklefs 2006: 161–163; cf. more generally Wessing 1997; cf. also Stewart 2019: 178, 185–187). Besides such instances of explicit references to non-Islamic entities, Islamic texts from southern Asia abound in an imagery that outside of the Islamic context refers to specific Hindu or Buddhist divinities, but which is instead applied to Islamic entities in texts authored by Muslims (cf. Ricci 2011: 114–115).

Perhaps the most intriguing assimilation of a Sanskritic body of knowledge and bodily practices into Islamic discourse in southern Asia is provided by the family of traditions often labelled as *siddha*, *tantra*, or *yoga* (cf. as general overview White 1996). The translation of Indian texts on *yoga* into Persian and Arabic, the adaptation of yogic practices in certain Sufi orders, such as the Shaṭṭāriyya, and the connection between Sufis and certain Hindu groups, has been studied in some detail (Ernst 2003a, 2003b; 2005; cf. also Burchett 2019; Nair 2020). But the translation of yogic knowledge and practice into Arabic and Persian is only the tip of the iceberg in comparison to the Muslim engagement with *siddha*, and related traditions in the “vernaculars” of southern Asia. There is hardly any language of southern Asia with an Islamic textual tradition in which such an engagement is not found. Whether it is the development of an “Islamic yoga” in Bengali (Hatley 2007; Irani 2016), Muslim alchemy and *siddha*-poetry in Tamil (Natarajan 2004; Schomburg 2011), Tantric narratives in Malay (Braginsky 2004b), the “mystic synthesis” of Hindu and Muslim traditions in Java (Ricklefs 2006), or the “as-if” yoga integrated into the Sufism of the Avadhi *premākhyān*-poems (Behl 2012: 176), the phenomenon is widespread and striking.

Yet, despite the occasional recognition of the existence of comparable developments in other languages (e.g., Braginsky 2004b: 154–155), the walls separating scholarship on different languages and the tendency to consider only what has been written in Arabic or Persian as relevant for the history of Islam, have as yet prevented scholarship to consider the phenomenon as a major aspect of the history of Islam in southern Asia. While detailed research for the different linguistic traditions is still very much needed, it is also important to consider possible connections between these traditions, not simply in terms of a shared “pre-Islamic” past, but also of Muslim actors. The Shaṭṭāriyya Sufi order, for example, has left a clear impact in several of the languages mentioned above, such as Avadhi, Javanese, Malay, and Tamil (cf. Behl 2012; Florida 2019; Tschacher 2019a). A particularly interesting aspect is the attachment of yogic knowledge to specific Arabic and Persian “prior texts” (cf. Ricci 2011: 245–260) within “vernacular” discourses. Such texts include *al-Tuḥfa al-Mursala ilā Rūḥ al-Nabī*, composed by Muḥammad b. Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānpūrī (d. 1620) and highly popular with authors writing in Javanese, Malay, and Tamil (Johns 1965; Tschacher 2009: 56), or the *Nūr Nāma* tradition, which exists in a number of South Asian languages such as Bengali, Sindhi, and Tamil (Bhalloo and Akhtar 2018: 335; d’Hubert 2019: 102–106; Irani 2016: 421–423; Uwise 1990: 124–125). This field still requires far more attention than it has received until now.

Language, literature, community

The last example brings us to the wider question of social context and community: who were the sponsors and audiences of “Sanskritic” Islamic discourse? A long-standing bias of scholarship, already deplored by Barbara Metcalf 25 years ago (1995: 960; cf. Tschacher 2014: 199–203), has been to associate such discourse with the “uneducated” and “superficially Islamized” masses. But a simple survey of the literature we have surveyed here disproves this claim. Not only do Asian Muslim authors display an often substantial and detailed knowledge of Arabic and Persian texts, but the social contexts in which these texts were produced, belie the notion of a literature for the ignorant. In effect, much of the texts we have discussed were produced by

social elites, from the royal courts of Java and Sumatra in the case of Javanese and Malay, to the landed elites of the Gangetic plains in the case of Avadhi, to the long-distance merchants of the Coromandel Coast in the case of Tamil. Even in those cases where Islamic texts can to a degree be connected to rural, agrarian populations, as in Bengali or Malayalam (cf. Arafath 2020: 518; Eaton 1993: Chapter 10), there are noteworthy exceptions, such as the Bengali poet Ālāol, a courtier in the kingdom of Arakan (d’Hubert 2018). For these reasons, one has to be skeptical of the notion that “vernacular” Islamic literature served the purpose of “familiarizing” Asian Muslims with an “unfamiliar” religion and its ideas.

Given the diverse and often educated backgrounds of authors and audiences, the question becomes one of value, rather than familiarity (cf. d’Hubert 2018: 230); Muslims wrote in the languages of southern Asia because they valued these languages both for their literary versatility as well as their capacity of expressing existential “truths.” Certain truths, it seems, were better expressed in a Sanskritic idiom than in Arabic, as demonstrated by the volume of Muslim *siddha*-literature in comparison to the rarefied reflections of that discourse in Arabic or Persian. The question of what was actually “sayable” in a given tradition needs to be considered to a greater degree than has been done until now. For example, scholars have noted the “scholastic” (Orsini 2014: 243) and “academic” (Phukan 2009: 216) nature of ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Bilgrāmī’s Persian commentary on Hindavi poetry in the *Ḥaqā’iq-i Hindī*. While religious concerns with the nature of North Indian Krishna worship may have been part of Bilgrāmī’s reluctance to engage with certain aspects of the poetry he was commenting on (cf. Orsini 2014: 243–244), Bilgrāmī’s problem may as much have been an aesthetic as a religious one, as Shantanu Phukan (2009: 216) has suggested: the detailed depiction of the female body that was part of the Sanskritic *nakha-śikha* (“toe-nail-to-head”) descriptive conventions did not suit the subdued poetics of the Persian *ghazal*, and Bilgrāmī may have written precisely for an audience that was reluctant to move beyond the boundaries of Persian aesthetics.

What precisely Muslims of southern Asia valued in Sanskritic idioms differed from case to case. For example, in the case of Javanese, value accrued from the poetic tradition of Old Javanese with its adaptations of the Sanskrit “epics,” as expressed by the verse quoted earlier in this chapter (cf. Ricklefs 2006: 223–224). Similar claims have been made for Tamil (Narayanan 2000), but here, the case actually seems to be a bit different: what Muslim Tamil authors explicitly praised as valuable was not the poems of the “pre-Islamic” past, but the poetics. Consequently, references to non-Muslim authorities on grammar and aesthetics abound in Islamic Tamil literature (Tschacher 2014: 203–206; Tschacher 2019b: 83–90). Nor was the question of value limited to a single idiom. The Bengali poet Ālāol, for example, operated in a context where multiple literary traditions were esteemed, both “cosmopolitan” (Persian, Sanskrit) and “vernacular” (Avadhi, Maithili, Bengali).

Indeed, this last point brings us back to the question of community and the idea of translation. How did Muslim poets conceptualize the boundaries between different languages, between the words and images that made up discourse in these languages? Commonly, scholars have assumed that “language” lies in “words”: thus, *nabī* is “Arabic,” *avatāra* is “Sanskrit” or “Bengali.” This provides the basis for much of the discussion of Arabic versus vernacular vocabulary that we reviewed above. Ayesha Irani (2011: 203) has characterized this conceptualization succinctly when she adduces that the identification of codes from different languages in translation “flings open the gates that ordinarily guard the frontiers of source and target languages/cultures.” But through which codes did Muslims in southern Asia separate different languages? Thibaut d’Hubert (2018: 245 n. 49) has made the claim that, “in Ālāol’s time and place, languages – or more precisely language names – were less relevant than prosodic forms to identify a text and the tradition to which it belonged.” Consequently, he connects the practice of translation

in such a context to the idea of the commentary in Sanskrit, where linguistic boundaries are less important than the systematic reformulation of a text in order to facilitate understanding. Ālāol's translations were all the more literal the less literary they were, as literary translation involved working at the level of prosodic patterns rather than just words (d'Hubert 2018: 219–223). I have argued something very similar in the case of Tamil: as mentioned above, Tamil Muslim authors recognized Arabic and Tamil words not as “translations” of each other, but as “synonyms.” These could be employed to produce Tamil “commentaries” (*urai*) of Arabic texts by systematically glossing each Arabic morpheme with a Tamil “synonym” – not surprisingly, the Arabic root *tarjama*, “to translate,” is glossed in Tamil as *urai cey-*, “to comment.” But by virtue of being “commentaries,” such literal “translation” could not be literary, for that required the transformation of form and aesthetics more than the substitution of words (Tschacher 2011; 2019b: 94–96). Here, as in the case of Ālāol, translation involved the reworking of form and aesthetics to a far greater degree than the identification of words and meanings.

Conclusion

The rich archive of Islamic texts and literature written in the various “vernacular” traditions of southern Asia provides us with a valuable and necessary corrective to scholarly practice, that has often located the history of Islamic discourse in southern Asia – or at least, Islamic discourse that mattered – to lie in Arabic and Persian texts. For many decades, “vernacular” Islamic discourse in the region was identified as the preserve of the ignorant and uneducated. It could serve only as evidence for the slow but inexorable victory of Islam’s “pattern of perfection” (Robinson 1983: 190–197), or at best, for the syncretic tolerance of local Muslims (e.g., Roy 1983), but it was certainly worthless for the history of Islam more generally. The “translation turn” of the last two decades has done a tremendous service to highlight the nuanced manners in which Asian Muslims “translated” Islam into existing vocabularies and patterns of meaning, sometimes against serious constraints. The essentialist and value-laden constructs of supposedly timeless “patterns of perfections” and their “syncretic” mixture have undergone a thorough critique and are in this form, hopefully, a thing of the past.

However, the focus on Asian Islam as “translated” Islam has in some ways, and unintentionally, reinforced elements of the earlier understanding of Islam in southern Asia. Most importantly, it has to a degree strengthened the centrality of Arabic and Persian, even if inadvertently, for the creation of Islamic discourse in southern Asian vernaculars, as these two languages have continued to serve as the main media through which Islam in the region has been understood. Moreover, given that the translation model has only rarely been applied to one of these two languages by scholars (cf. Zadeh 2012 for a rare counter-example), the impression could arise that “real” Islamic discourse is formulated in these languages and then “translated” into Asian vernaculars. However, a number of recent studies have begun to highlight that Arabo-Persian knowledge systems are not sufficient for understanding how Islamic literatures in the vernaculars of southern Asia were composed. Attention has shifted away from a sole consideration of religious knowledge and paid greater attention to discourses on language and poetics, a branch of knowledge highly developed in southern Asia (cf. Behl 2012; Braginsky 2004a: Chapter 6; d'Hubert 2018; Tschacher 2019b). Rather than one single knowledge tradition providing a key to understanding the Islamic literatures of southern Asia, authors were “multilingual” and creative in the ways they combined knowledge from different sources (cf. Orsini 2014: 244).

This is why I stressed the role of Sanskrit, or rather the Sanskritic, in this chapter. When Muslims began formulating Islam in the local idioms of southern Asia, they were not simply

trying to express new ideas in a language they were familiar with. That language itself had long served, not simply as the vehicle of a specific “religion” (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.), but as a way of talking about and contesting Truth itself, as Sara Cappelletti’s (2019) discussion of the *avatāra*-terminology reveals. This was a challenge to Muslims not only because they somehow had to carry across the message of the revelation to Muhammad to audiences in southern Asia, but because that message had to make sense in terms that people in southern Asia had long recognized to be True. If Islam is “*meaning making for the self in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation to Muhammad as Pre-Text, Text, and Con-Text*,” as Shahab Ahmed has suggested (2016: 405; emphasis in original), it meant acknowledging the existence of the Pre-Text, the “*Unseen Reality or Truth that lies beyond and behind the Truth of the Revelation-in-the-Seen*” (Ahmed 2016: 346; emphasis in original). However important the historical revelation to Muhammad in “clear Arabic language” (*lisān ‘arabī mubīn*; Qur’an 16:106) was, this was after all only the final instance of a long line of prophets sent “as messenger among every community” (*fi kulli ummatin rasūlan*; Qur’an 16:36).

While Arabic allowed a privileged access to the Truth, being the language of the text of the final revelation, this was not its sole medium. Theologians explicitly acknowledged that Arabic was not the “language” of the eternal Pre-Text, as Arabic was itself created (Zadeh 2012: 114–115). Arabic may have been unfamiliar to people in southern Asia, but Truth was not, even if it had been corrupted in local traditions. In many parts of southern Asia, Sanskritic terminologies and knowledge-formations had played an important role in negotiating Truth prior to the coming of Islam, and it is no surprise that they continued to do so even among Muslims. At the same time, it should also not be forgotten that Sanskritic discourses were only one element in the complex negotiation of Truth among Muslims – other idioms existed within these discourses, such as the particular terminologies of Javanese or Tamil, as well as outside of them, such as the Chinese Han Kitab (cf. Ben-Dor Benite 2005; Petersen 2018; Tontini 2016). Yet, what is important is to recognize that Sanskritic terms and discourses did not simply make a “foreign” religion familiar, but that these were in themselves valued forms of knowledge without which we are unable to understand the way large numbers of Muslims in Asia have approached Islam for centuries.

Note

- 1 I share Francesca Orsini’s (2020) misgivings with regard to the notion of hierarchy implicit in the term “vernacular,” yet continue to use it, as it provides the least-complicated way to succinctly contrast these languages to Arabic or Persian. For my understanding of “southern Asia,” cf. Blackburn and Feener 2019: 8–9.

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5

ISLAMIC FEMINISMS IN ASIA

Trials and tribulations for Muslim women¹

Huma Ahmed-Ghosh

Though the majority of Muslims (approximately 60%) live in Asia, western political interests have focused on the Middle East as the hub for Islam and its various avatars to globally define a homogenous Muslim identity for their political interests. Asia is a vast region with the largest diversity in religion, ethnicity, politics, and cultural and socio-economic history worldwide. Asia is also a region that has birthed and experienced/nourished the largest range of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, etc., to name some of the mainstream ones. Confucianism, Hinduism, through the Manusmriti (an ancient Hindu text on which contemporary family codes are based), and other religious texts have dictated gender relationships and hierarchies that have coincidentally been similar and patriarchal in their philosophies, laws, and prescriptions on how to conduct daily lives and rituals that subscribe to gender inequalities.² In recent decades, representation of women in Asian societies, through contemporary socio-cultural shifts in religiosity, mainly the practice of Islam, has led to the questioning of piety, resistance, and representation of Islam in Asia as reflected through Muslim women's lived realities.

In this chapter, I deconstruct the concept of “the homogenized Muslim woman,” and reflect on how lives of Muslim women in Asia are impacted by various interpretations of Islamic feminisms, and the not-so Islamic feminisms. Besides social class and regional differences among Muslims, differences exist in the various “types” of Islam practiced, such as Shias, Sunnis, Ahmadis, Ismailis, etc. (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2008a). I will not discuss these differences here, but I want to bring to light the lack of homogeneity that exists among the Muslim population globally. This chapter also complicates the debate on what defines the Muslim woman and which Muslim woman is the authentic representation of Islam. The chapter engages with concepts of agency, feminism, piety, and gender equity as perceived by their practitioners. Muslim women's lived realities contribute to the level of piety and religiosity they practice in their daily lives. How is piety defined? What are the dilemmas? Is there a difference between piety and religion? These are questions to which no clear-cut answers exist, but can be used to frame and comprehend why and how people and, in this case, Muslim women, choose to express their religiosity in the multiple ways they do and live out their lives according to these choices and decisions. This further complicates Muslim women's realities in Asia as elsewhere, as I mention (2015: 1),

women struggle to claim agencies and rights within their countries as dictated by regional historical, political, and social institutions that lead to constantly shifting cultural values and prescriptions. Shifting of cultures is also a result of global embroilment.

Islam and “westernization”

Unfortunately, the discourses on Islamic feminism and the emergence of Muslim and Islamic women’s groups have primarily been in response to the West’s projection of the religion, Islamic states, and all Muslims in general. Islam and westernization are always viewed as binary: east vs. west, Christianity versus Islam, and, for both westerners and Muslims, these binaries carry a value judgement that translates into “good (west) versus bad (east).” The dichotomous debates in feminism on what is western and what is Islamic continues to rage in its oppositionality. This binary and contentious discourse is a product of deliberate politics that ultimately is about “contested masculinities” where “women’s bodies are used as globalized property” to claim nationalistic hegemony (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008b). It is also about the timeless animosity between the Christians (read as western) and Muslims (read as eastern) and between Christianity and Islam which is a throwback to the political wrangling of the crusades (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008b). As I have claimed before (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2015:2), dilemmas exist for Muslim feminists in terms of representing and negotiating feminisms among Muslim women’s movements.

For me, living in the West has created the quandaries of how I am seen and how I explain and represent Muslim women. Western feminists see me as a secular feminist (from India) because of my career choice to be a professor in a women’s studies department in the US and simultaneously expected me to teach gender and Islam! Not wearing a headscarf, or being perceived as a non-practitioner of pious Islam, some Muslims and traditional communities see me as a “non-Muslim” and sometimes as a “not-good-enough-Muslim.” This leads to another predicament when I try to discuss traditional Muslim women’s choices to be pious: I am either seen as not being secular or leftist enough by secular Muslim feminists, or I am appropriated by the more conservative Muslims as representing them and therefore as a proponent of Islamic feminism. If I critique Islamic feminism, then I am a “bad Muslim,” appropriated by western feminists as supporting their cause in denigrating Islam! To continue, those Muslim women who conform to the strictures of an Islamic lifestyle are viewed by westerners as symbols of a regressive Islam with limited rights, and by Islamists as a “pure” symbol of the faith. As I mentioned in a previous essay (Ahmed-Ghosh 2015:2),

Such external constructions and expectations of women’s behavior render their own decisions, choices, and life circumstances invisible and their realities are reduced to simplistic and judgmental interpretations. While there is, rightfully, a revival of the debate on women in Islam, especially their representation in the Quran, it is done more in a context of addressing the West’s perception of Muslim women.

An example is the revival of veiling, especially among young Muslim women, and very commonly in families where the mother and older women are not veiled. Veiling, for women, is the most symbolic expression of piety in Islam. Many Muslim women have also adopted the veil as a gesture of opposition and resistance to the West and the West’s stereotyping of all Muslim women as “being backward and oppressed.” For women who are choosing to wear the headscarf as a sign of respect to their faith and an expression of piety, this feels also “liberating” and

status-enhancing in the family and larger Muslim community. In interesting ways, women are taking on the familial role to Islamize the family, while withdrawing to the home and conservativeness, but finding meaning in their new-found roles. The veil is also empowering them by allowing them to be “public beings,” leaving the house and getting an audience, a purpose in life, and respect by other women in the community who see them as role models. Muslim women can now engage in previously forbidden activities such as reading and interpreting the Qur’an publicly, and donning leadership roles in their community.

In the following sections I will contend with what is Islamic feminism and the response from Muslim secular feminists in an attempt to continue the debate on what the concept of “feminism” really represents, stands for, or means to its proponents. This brings up the age-old question of whether one can simultaneously be religious and feminist.

Religious piety and veiling

As I point out repeatedly, women’s bodies are used as sites of resistance, conformity, and renegotiations by patriarchies and women alike. Are women the new gatekeepers, and transmitters of religion, community, and national bearers of Islam? Retraditionalization – is it regressive or empowering? Here I will try to distinguish between piety and religion. Piety is part of religion, but one can be religious without being pious too. To borrow from Calvinism, the following quote states it most succinctly,

Religion, though slightly different in feature and purpose from piety, is her joined-at-the-hip twin. Here indeed [piety] is a pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.

Institutes, I.ii.2 <https://www.thebanner.org/features/2011/01/piety-and-religion>

One cannot talk about Muslim women’s piety without referencing Saba Mahmood’s seminal work in Egypt. Mahmood in the two editions of her book titled, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005 & 2012) lays out through ethnographic research the relationship between agency and politics. Mahmood concludes (2005: 139),

The discourse of piety, oriented towards relearning ethical sensibilities and transforming the selves of women to create a new social and moral order, neither argues for gender equality, nor does it reinforce traditional gender roles. Instead, it attaches value to outward markers of piety, such as the veil, as a means for cultivating religiosity.

Saba Mahmood’s work caught the attention of western and non-western feminists in the historical moment of the aftermath of 9/11 when Islam-bashing was at its peak and the US went to war to “liberate Afghan women.” Mahmood’s books (2012 [2005]) provided clarity to a world that had little knowledge of the faith and was exposed more to politically motivated misinformation, once again using Muslim women’s bodies to denounce Islam. Coopting the term “agency” to embolden Egyptian women who retraditionalized and participated in conversations and study groups on the Qur’an can be seen as an attempt on the part of Mahmood to enlighten the West on the capacity of women to engage with their faith on their own terms and in public. Mahmood’s work challenged the condemnation of Islam in its totality by emphasizing the role of piety in Muslim women’s lives as alternative spaces for empowerment.

As was to be expected, there followed a valid critique of Mahmood's work to which she did respond in the second edition of the book (Mahmood 2012 [2005]). A major critique was that by labeling women's retraditionalization as "agency" among the pious believers, Mahmood inadvertently (or not) empowered these women who in turn strictly conformed to the patriarchal strictures of Islam. Hence, they simultaneously gained prestige and power in the community as "good" pious Muslims, and also furthering the Sharia-informed legalistic system of gender inequality and oppression. Mahmood (2012 [2005]: x) countered and clarified,

I was not interested in delivering judgements on what counts as feminist versus anti-feminist practice to distinguish a subversive act from a non-subversive one. The aim of this book is to develop an analytic language for thinking about modalities of agency that exceed liberatory projects. (xi) While the piety movement undoubtedly seems at times inimical and at times indifferent to feminism, the pietist's main concern lies elsewhere: namely, the cultivation of submission to what its members interpret to be God's will.

When it comes to Islamic piety too, the word that is shunned by most Muslim women is feminism because they see it as a concept loaded with westernization which then implies a move to an "equality" which has led to higher levels of domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape, dysfunctional families, as well as rocketing high divorces, abandonment of children, and overall disastrous familial relationships, ultimately leading to an amoral and licentious society. According to Marddnt (2013: 254), in Thailand

The idea of feminism has been discussed extensively among many Muslim women who return to Islam in a purification process. Muslim women in the Islamic reformation are generally middle class and began to adopt Islamic concepts rather than imitating the Western feminist model. This reflects the dominant modern socio-political situation in the Muslim world that demands a return to the religiously based model of the Islamic Golden Age.

Another very important factor that advances the need for such movements is the illusion of social class where the myth that Islam is founded on an egalitarian *umma* (all Muslims are equal in the eyes of Allah) has given lower and middle classes access to the religious texts and a mobility that was previously denied to them. As Marddnt (2013: 243) further points out,

The majority of the new members recruited by Nahdatul Muslimat are young Muslim students facing difficulties with modern Thai society. They are impressed by the movement's style of debate with regard to religious piety and Muslim women in Thailand – adaptation and resistance to modernity, as well as by the way it promotes modern Islamic interpretations of gender issues.

Group identity is strengthened and reinforced through the adoption of piety and faith in countries that are seeing a rise in nationalism, majoritarianism, and communal disharmony, along with a sense of modernity that precludes minorities and women from the gains of globalization. In Thailand, the fundamentalist Islamic movement is fueled by an anti-Buddhism antagonism, in India the anti-Muslim rhetoric by the current Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP – Hindu nationalist party) is responsible for the heightened Islamization in the country; and in China the Islamic movement is not just an anti-communist movement, but has climaxed due to the internment

and oppression of all Muslims in the country. This, coupled with the anti-West stance, has thrust forward Muslim women who see it as their responsibility and religious duty to protect their faith, families, and community.

Brief overview of Muslimization in Asian countries

Feminism in Asia, irrespective of religion, has defined itself according to “Asian Values.” Once again, this may be seen as contrary to western values of individualism, but Asian values continue to be derived from ancient philosophies and religions and are still embedded in state and local institutions and form the ideological backbone of most Asian cultures and societies. Asian socio-economic systems may have benefitted from such a value system, but the very core of these assumed virtues have also been used to create and legitimize hierarchies that have always been discriminatory to gender, ethnicities, religions, caste, and class. Some of the dominant virtues of the Asian value system are cooperativeness, where the individual is part of a community and the collective; sacrifice and duty to the elderly; filial piety; and loyalty to family, community, and in professional life. In terms of gender hierarchies, Asian values prescribe complementarity of roles where the motto is “separate but equal.” This value system is very conducive to an adoption of Islamic values where Muslims in Asia have already been socialized into this value system, and take it a step further by conflating it with Islamic prescriptions for women and men to refine these gender hierarchies.

As Susanne Schroter (2013: 7–8) points out in her introduction to the edited volume titled, *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia: Women's Rights Movements, Religious Resurgence and Local Traditions* (2013), the shift to Islamization and adoption of patriarchal family and kinship roles is new for many matrilineal and matrifocal Southeast Asian cultures. For example, an “Islamic moral order” was imposed in Aceh and the wearing of the veil was made mandatory. As everywhere, culture is the first thing that is assaulted by conservatives and extremists. In Indonesia and other Islamic countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc., alcohol and bars are banned, gender segregation is enforced along with mandatory veiling, *halal* becomes the norm for food, and family laws are based on the shariah. Piety is enforced for women, and Muslim women's organizations redefine themselves along lines of Islamism.

Mahmood's (2012 [2005]) work in Egypt on piety as discussed earlier finds resonance in Asian countries too. Svetlana Peshkova's (2015) essay on Uzbekistan and Ontichalars (female religious teachers and leaders) shows how they have created a space for themselves in the new country. Peshkova (2015: 23) elaborates,

Because one's leadership is essentially emotional and in-bodied, in spite of how others evaluate them, these and other women leaders continue to effect change in themselves and others.

With the break-away from the Soviet Union in 1991, Uzbekistan has regrouped as an Islamic nation and as Peshkova claims it is “wanting to reorient toward a ‘correct Islam’.” For Uzbek Islamic teachers and healers, their sense of piety and religiosity is rooted in their own sense of service to their God and while the government, their community, and male religious leaders may not view them as “religious leaders,” Ontichalars have embodied their religiosity and aspired to their roles with a conviction that for them cannot deny their leadership roles in the communities they serve.

The complexity of agency and how each woman perceives her own agency, especially in Asian societies, is very reflective of state politics and histories. Through her research on the

Hui Muslims in China's X'ian region, Maris Boyd Gillett (2015) reflects on how this demographic has appropriated Salafi Islam to carve out an "empowered" niche in their communities as good Muslim women. In conformity with "Asian values" of "complementarity of gender roles," Hui women earn their local community and familial status as transmitters of the faith not just to their children, but also through ensuring that their husbands become and stay good Muslim men.

In Asia, education plays an interesting and prominent role in the formation and dissemination of Islamic ideology to the Muslim youth and women. Worldwide education, knowledge production, and institutions of learning are the most politicized ones. It is through education that hegemonic ideologies are transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, political control of education through rewriting of textbooks, altering historical accounts of nationhood, limiting access to education select demographic groups (e.g., girls in Afghanistan and Dalits in India, etc.) reinforces gender and socio-economic hierarchies. For Chinese Muslims, an oppositional stance to state-mandated communism that obliterates all religions and diverse cultures has also led to a demand for Islamic schools for Muslim children. (Jaschok and Chan 2015)

Saudi hegemony in the spread of Salafi Islam has led to mushrooming of Islamic boarding schools all over Asia. The desire to educate children in Islamic schools especially among the lower and middle classes is in sharp contrast to their own education and earlier aspirations for their children to get a secular, westernized education so they could compete in the global market. In many instances a generation that received secular education in Asian countries is seeing their children seeking out Islamic institutions for higher education. Many of these are funded by Saudi Arabia and are combining secular education with Islamic education. They are upscale, provide scholarships, and pay their teachers handsomely, creating a sense of modernity that is then imbibed to counter western modernization. In many parts of Asia, the educated youth and women formed local movements after their educational experiences in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Many Asian Muslim youths have been flooding Malaysian universities for education, and then returning to their home countries to form groups founded mainly in the Salafi tradition. Social media is also playing a major role in the dissemination of religious ideology, and it is used very effectively by the youth to recruit and spread the word of Islamic fundamentalism far and wide. These groups focus on piety, encouraging women to become "*muminah* with *taqwa*" which translates to "righteous women with higher consciousness" (Marddent 2013: 250).

As it was apparent in southern Thailand, according to Amporn Marddent (2013: 241), a protest by Muslim students at the Yala Teacher's Training College to be allowed to wear the veil in college was the beginning of a nationwide movement to be veiled in educational institutions, workplaces, and in the public. This movement started around 1987–1988 and gained momentum among many, especially the Muslim youths and young women, becoming a successful movement. As Marddent (2013: 243) observed in her research,

In Thailand, [and other parts of Asia,] the practice of voluntary veiling is an expression of commitment to Islam. Cooperating closely with other Islamic organizations, women's organizations and Muslim politicians strove to achieve a consensus between the Thai state authorities and the Muslim community with regard to a bill that would allow Muslim women to wear the *hijab* in public places and on the pictures of their ID cards and passports. It should be apparent that the *hijab* movement in Thailand provided a space that was conducive to the emergence of Muslim women's movements calling for religious freedom.

Religious freedom has also been the clarion call for Turkish Muslim women who have invoked secularism to gain human rights. These calls have been loudest on university campuses where, till a decade ago, women students were not allowed to wear the headscarf. Interestingly, this stricture was removed by the Islamic regime, when the AKP came into power. Through her ethnographic research in the country, Zeynep Akbulut (2015) concludes that the demand for veiling was based on Muslim women's need to claim piety through wearing the headscarf as true believers of Islam, while still claiming women's rights in a so-called secular state. The banning of the veil in previous decades was seen as a denial of human rights. Thus, we see the appropriation of a secular discourse on human rights as in opposition to religious rights being invoked by many Islamists in secular states to claim their religious rights. This shift in framework of analysis for religious human rights creates spaces for conservatism that furthers the religious agenda of Islamists and fundamentalists.

Emerging Muslim women's groups in India are following a similar logic by pressuring their secular states and the nation to demand separatist family laws and shariah-based legislation under the guise of a definition of secularism defined as a tolerance towards and expression of all religions. Muslim women's groups have come together to petition changes in the Muslim Personal Law but within the confines of the Qur'an and shariah. One issue that has divided the Muslim women's groups and Muslim feminists in India is the Triple *Talaq* (divorce) Bill, which has banned Muslim men from divorcing their wives simply by uttering "I divorce you" thrice in front of a witness in one sitting. This has historically, and currently, had complicated implications for Muslim women who have been abandoned, forced to consummate a second marriage to be reunited with their first husband, and left in penury because of the limited alimony laws prescribed in the shariah laws. Some so-called progressive Muslim women's groups feel that the right-wing Hindu group is interfering in their personal laws and therefore counter such perceived interference by conforming even more strictly to their family laws, not so differently from Muslim and Islamic groups that have claimed dominance by taking an anti-West stance. The attempts on the part of the right-wing Hindu government to create a Hindu nation has led to a high level of alienation among its minorities, and once again we see that women and their bodies are "used" by Islamic *ulema* and by conservative women themselves to enforce strict segregation and enforcement of the Muslim Personal Law – once again piety is invoked to "protect" and claim "citizenship," which is threatened under majoritarian regimes.

Similar to India, Islamists in Malaysia are taking recourse to literal interpretations of Islamic religious texts, and reintroducing polygamy. The Global Ikhwan Polygamy Club has numerous branches including an Obedient Wives Club, and runs schools for children where they are taught such Islamic values. This club has come under much criticism from within and outside of Malaysia by feminists but is a thriving club even today. Indonesia has also reinstated the shariah and polygamous rights. Sonja Van Wichelen (2015: 226) in her research on polygamy in Indonesia concludes that,

Rather than reflecting a more doctrinal return to Islam, it exemplifies contestations over ideas of manhood and masculinity – Islamization and democratization processes alter the hegemonic status of national Muslim masculinity.

Van Wichelen's discussion on this form of hyper-masculinity is interesting, and also necessary if we are to comprehend the complicity of Muslim women who willingly participate in such patriarchal institutions. Women interviewed by Van Wichelen were willing partners in such marriages, and quoted reasons range from "it is mentioned in the Qur'an" and the "Prophet

Muhammad had numerous wives,” to “there is a sisterhood in such arrangements,” “husbands will not ‘stray’” (meaning they will not visit prostitutes or maintain mistresses), “easier to find a husband,” etc. (2015: 226). Such Islamism is politicized through the example of a secular president, Suharto (1921–2008), performing the *hajj*, and his daughter adopting the veil to woo the large, Islamized population. It should be mentioned though that in Malaysia and Indonesia, some Muslim women’s groups are resisting shariah-based family laws and fighting against polygamy and discriminatory laws. These groups want to enforce the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), focus on reproductive health, and increase political participation of women in secular spaces.

Hegemony of Arabization or Saudi Islam

All of Asia is seeing a rise in not just increased piety, veiling, and adoption of Islamic rituals in public, but also in the Arabization of these actions. Piety is now being defined and practiced according to the Salafi school of thought in Islam. The style of veiling is also very reflective of their training abroad. Head covering is done in the Saudi style, Muslims in Asia are learning Arabic and adopting Arabic cultural traits. This is also resulting in the shift from the Qur’an to an emphasis on the Hadith and shariah to lead their daily lives and create new laws and legislation. The Qur’an continues to be the basic and most important text for Muslims, but the shariah is now being seen as equally holy and a prescription for all Islamic cures – mainly legislation. Besides reading the Qur’an in Arabic, language in Asia is reflecting Arabic religious terminology too as well as a shift in greetings and blessings. In South Asia, the word for the fasting month was *ramzaan* and now it is *ramadan*, similarly new greetings are added such as *Jumma Mubarak* (happy Friday), *Jazakallah Khair* (Arabic for: may Allah reward you with good) in response to thank you, as spellings of religious terms are shifting from local languages, Persian and Urdu, to Arabic.

Islamic feminism

Given the retraditionalization of Islamic practices and lifestyles discussed so far, and the rapid spread of Islamism in Asian countries, academics and feminists have crowded the intersection of religion, women’s rights, human rights, and sexuality studies. They also challenge the oft-repeated sentiment that “Muslim women are victims,” and Muslim societies are hyper-patriarchal, thereby treating Muslim women as needing to be rescued by the West. Academics have tended to theorize Muslim women’s movements, resistance to westernization, reclaiming of theological spaces, challenging and reinterpreting of Islamic texts, owning *ijtihad* to question the literal faith, and expounding on the agency of women. These theorizations have led to the creation of what one could refer to as Islamic feminism (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008a).

Islamic feminism in academia and as an alternative to western feminism took root in the 1990s, mainly after the emergence of theocratic states in the Middle East and Asia. That is not to say that these discourses did not exist before, but they became more prominent in the modern era due to global political and cultural shifts. At its base, Islamic feminists use religion as a framework to define gender roles, structure of the family and community, and ultimately, its inclusion in the formation of the nation state in which the individual is subsumed.

Islamic feminism does not challenge the tenets of the Qur'an, but confronts its various interpretations that according to Islamic feminists have been misread, misinterpreted, and misrepresented to claim a patriarchy that favors men.

Non-Islamic/western/secular feminism

As Marddient shows through her research on Thai Muslim women (2013: 261),

The views of the neo-orthodox movement regarding women's productive role in the Islamic reformation contributes to the increasingly conservative interpretation of gender and religious identity in the lives of Muslim women both in Islamic countries and secular states.

In my article "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminisms" (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008a: 106), I contend that "secular feminists, base their rationale for women's rights on a human rights discourse to enable and empower the individual in a secular democracy to create a civil society." For secular feminists, the role of religion, and specifically the use of shariah-based family laws, is very challenging. In Islamic exegesis, laws pertaining to sexuality that govern the lives of most Muslims, but primarily of women and the LGBTQ community, are very restrictive and problematic. Secular Muslim feminists separate religiosity and spirituality from the state and its legislature. They do not oppose religion or individuals' desire to be religious. For Muslim secularist feminists, the call for Islamic feminism is rooted in the religious texts and therefore does not challenge the religious patriarchy that is the basis for the laws that govern women. Also, most of these feminists align their ideology with western feminism, which is based more on equality of the sexes, races, class, etc., and a rights discourse that treats all humans as equals.

Haideh Moghissi,³ an Iranian feminist, expresses her concerns by claiming that, "the uncritical acceptance of Islamic feminism as a new liberatory project in Islamic societies is not in the service of women's cause" (2011: 76). She (2011:79) maintains that,

Feminism represents a moral vision and a movement central to which are the struggles for personal and social transformation and activism on behalf of individual women and women as a group to change legal and cultural constraints and gender practices in favor of women.

Moghissi critiques Mahmood's definition of agency by pointing out its limitations of being confined to just having the ability to "have individual powers to reason and to choose" and to claim to be independent or deciding oneself how to practice faith. Moghissi is adamant that agency is not only about making choices, but also about "resistance against domination" (2011: 77). As tricky as the term agency can be, my question is to what extent is the "owning" of agency an end in itself to claim liberation against unjust and hierarchal laws and practices? Does the combination of piety and religiosity with culture open up a pandora's box of what culture is? The assumption that culture is fixed is problematic, and creates a discourse that renders the faith immutable and therefore unchallengeable. This then is in direct contradiction to what Islamic feminists claim is the power of *ijtihad*.

Where the confusion lies in the varying discourses of Islamic and non-Islamic feminisms, is in the conflation of legalism and piety by many Muslim groups. In an effort to be devout Muslims, pious Muslim women adopt the hierarchical and discriminatory legal strictures as

an integral part of their faith that will bring them salvation and a place in heaven. Moghissi (2011: 82) elaborates on this distinction by claiming,

My concern has been that the scholars who harbor heady enthusiasm for Islamic feminism often neglect the crucial distinction between Islam as a legal and political system and Islam as spiritual and moral guidance. By focusing only on the latter, they unwittingly soften the sharp edges of the former.

She, as numerous secular feminists do, claims that unless one challenges the restrictions and oppressions placed on women within the faith, “transformational” changes occur neither in the faith nor in Muslim women’s lives. In my discussion of piety and Muslim women’s lives in Asia, this fuzziness of boundaries between spirituality and legalism becomes apparent.

Conclusions and persistent dilemmas

As mentioned earlier, there are no clear-cut answers to Muslim women’s dilemmas about best practices to engage with feminism. I have tried to attempt a conciliatory suggestion in a previous article (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008a: 99),

There is a pragmatic value to developing a standard for Islamic feminism that can be “modern” and held up to more oppressive local conditions/politics and their extremes of patriarchy. To do this, one needs a comprehensive review of what local oppressions exist in specific countries and what feminist angles can be brought together in a hybridized version. One needs to look at what coalitional functions can occur in different communities which can bring together Islamic, secular, and womanist discourses in a hybridized form that attend better to women’s lived lives and sense of personhood.

Since the publication of my article in 2008, I have been critiqued by Muslim feminists for being naïve in my conceptualizations of a hybrid modality as a compromise to both Islamic feminism and secular feminism. I am not in disagreement with my critics, and since the publication of that article I have seen an increase in piety, submission to the legalities in the shariah, and a more besieged mentality among Muslims in the last decade. There has been a pushback by many Muslim communities to the global political shift to the right, where Muslims are targeted for violence, prohibited to enter western countries, profiled for their names and appearance, and harassed for being visible Muslim because of the headscarf. In Asian countries too, where Muslims are the minority, targeting of Muslims has become the norm, leading women in such communities to band together to protect their men and sons from such backlash and violence. This was most recently apparent in India (2019–2020 winter) when hundreds of Muslim women of all age participated in a sit-in on the streets of Shaheen Bagh, a Muslim enclave of New Delhi, to protest the right-wing Hindu government’s attempts to declare most Muslims non-citizens by requiring them to prove their citizenship through non-existent documentation. I (Ahmed-Ghosh 2008a: 100) do still maintain that,

The reality for all women, religious or non-religious, is that they live in patriarchal cultures. Under patriarchy, there are situations where women willingly conform to Islamic norms (even if these norms are seen as oppressive by others) by engaging in what I term “patriarchy trading,”⁴ which allows them to claim some agency. The

concept of Islamic patriarchy may appear discordant to some Islamic feminists but as long as the Quran is referred to in order to define sexual inequality, these theorists have to work with a text that does identify specific gender hierarchies. This does not deny the rights the Quran ascribes to women, nor the mention of humanity that refers to both men and women in certain verses, but the underlying message of the Quran is that men are the “protectors and providers” of women and children.

Are fundamentalist Islamic movements gaining strength because of the failure of the nation-state, modernization projects based on westernization, national economic decline, festering communalism, and outbursts of radicalism, along with globalized political interference leading to disruption, fissures, and alienation among the youth? Is this process leading to a rethinking, retraditionalizing (golden-era projection), or reinvention of the faith, where faith is seen as a stabilizing institution that is unifying, less fracturing, and an answer to misery, peace, less mental distress, and hope for the future through renewed and rigorous piousness? Another question raised here, is there a “feminization” of Islam, distinct from feminism in Islam? And finally, are we looking for feminism in the wrong place? Maybe Islamic feminism is not feminism, and should be called by a different name. Marcia Hermansen titles her book *Muslima Theology* (Hermansen 2013), a nomenclature that would align more closely with Islamic feminism, and which shares some common ground with womanism.

Notes

- 1 I am indebted to the Fulbright Fellowship to India 2018–2019 that helped form some of the ideas expressed in this paper.
- 2 Coincidentally, both Confucianism and the Manusmriti (Hinduism) claim that when young, women are dependent on their fathers, then husbands, and finally their sons! On marriage, they are part of the patrilineal and patrilineal kinship system to the renouncement of their natal family and home.
- 3 Dr. Moghissi was a founder of the Iranian National Union of Women and member of its first executive and editorial boards, before leaving Iran in 1984 (<https://profiles.laps.yorku.ca/profiles/moghissi/>).
- 4 Patriarchy trading: Ahmadi women, as mentioned in a previous article, are aware of the patriarchal constraints in their religion but opt for it over what they refer to as western patriarchy which is overlaid with resentment towards Islam and is racist.

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PART II

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6

EASTERN AFRICAN DOYENS IN SOUTH ASIA

Premodern Islamic intellectual interactions

Mahmood Kooria

“The Indian Ocean Muslims” have contributed to the synthesis of Islamic history for over a millennium, but their roles have been continuously downplayed and disregarded in the historiography. The South Asians (*al-Hindīs*), Southeast Asians (*al-Jāwīs*) and Eastern Africans (*al-Zanjīs*, Swahilis, *al-Ḥabshīs*) interacted across the Indian Ocean highway and all shaped Islam in their own ways. Only a small number of people indeed voyaged overseas physically, but a large number of communities were influenced by the ideas introduced by those who did travel. Specifically, the history of Islamic law in the Indian Ocean world narrates this general pattern of mobility across communities, doctrines, texts, sources, places and periods. The Arabs and Persians played an inevitable role in circulating certain basic ideas of Islam, but they did not “export” it wholesale to “the peripheries,” as many studies of Islam in the Indian Ocean littoral have illustrated, thereby ignoring the African and Asian contributions (see, for example, Cherian 1969: 8; Forbes 1981; Lakshmi 2012: 80–85; Ilias 2007; Wink 1996). The making of Islam in the littoral was a rather complex process with active involvement of people from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. Once introduced to the religion, these Indian Ocean Muslims formulated and reformulated their own perspectives and practices in constructive and creative ways and transferred them to other places and peoples. Against this background, stories of several African and Asian doyens working in South, Southeast Asia and Eastern Africa in premodern centuries are crucial as significant benefactors to the historical and human experience of Islam.

In the premodern Arabo-Persian geographical literature, Zabaj, Zanj, and Wāqwāq stood as boundaries of the Indian Ocean world. While Zabaj stood for Sumatra or island Southeast Asia at large and Zanj for the Eastern African region in and around present-day Zanzibar (from Zanjbar), scholars disagreed on what Wāqwāq specifically meant. Many identified it with Madagascar or Japan.¹ Some identified two Wāqwāqs, one in Sumatra and the other in Madagascar, representing the two ends of Malay culture in the Indian Ocean (Ferrand 1932). Whether or not Wāqwāq was a definite locale as Shawkat M. Toorawa (2000) has argued, it represented the conceptual limit of the known world in the premodern Arabic-Persian literature. It also explicates the historical exchanges between Southeast Asia and Eastern Africa, which are otherwise not duly acknowledged in Islamic historiography, whereas it is quite imaginable that migratory trajectories between Southeast Asia and East Africa were intertwined

with religious, cultural, and social interconnections.² The Sudanese, Abyssinians, Somalis and Zanzibaris contributed to the historical making of Islam in South and Southeast Asia as much as the Javanese, Makassarese, Buginese, Tamils, Malabaris, Gujaratis, to name only a few, underwrote the spread and survival of Islam in Eastern and Southern Africa.

In this contribution, I take a preliminary step towards understanding the Eastern Africans who worked in South Asia as judges, jurists, scholars, teachers, preachers and/or religious leaders in the premodern period, to demonstrate how they contributed to the making of Islam in the subcontinent, which now hosts the largest Muslim population in the world. This attempt is directly related to a considerable gap in the literature: the ways in which Africans in Asia have been discussed. Most studies present them as slaves and mercenaries alone, especially the growing literature on slavery in the Indian Ocean world, and neglect their socio-cultural functions outside the broad contemporary conceptions of “slavery” (Alpers 1975; 2010; Campbell 2006; Clarence-Smith 2006; 2013). A few literatures of political-military histories have analysed the military and administrative functions and struggles of many Africans, but their intellectual contributions are yet to be acknowledged (for example, see Shanti Ali 1996; Omar Ali 2016; Robbins and McLeod 2006).

A short note on the period and sources: although my larger project is to explore Islamic legal history in the premodern Indian Ocean world since its formative stages through comparative and connected histories of Arabs, Asians, and Africans, this essay is on a period between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Before the twelfth century, we rarely have any references on African–Asian intellectual interactions, whereas the situation dramatically changes by the sixteenth century with an unprecedented rise of African political and military elites in Asia, such as the Abyssinian kingdoms of Bengal and Janjira. By the second half of the sixteenth century, their number and influence increased even more through figures like Malik Ambar. In order to analyse their implications on, contributions to, and administration of legal systems, much space and time are needed, and I hope to take it up elsewhere. The centuries from the twelfth to the fifteenth century thus provide a small prelude to a larger phenomenon of the African intellectual contributions in the making of Islam and its laws in South and Southeast Asia. My major sources are travel accounts, *tārikh* literature and inscriptions from or on the South Asian littoral.

A jurist, an agent, and an endower

The Islamic scholarly community from coastal Eastern Africa is an important but largely neglected group that contributed to the making of Islamic law in the wider Indian Ocean littoral. The coast as such has been neglected in the Indian Ocean historiography, despite the ocean and/or its seas once being identified as the African Ocean, the Zanj Ocean (*Baḥr al-Zanj*) and the Abyssinian Ocean (*Baḥr al-Ḥabashī*).³ More than two decades ago Chandra de Silva (1999) endeavoured to deconstruct this myth by demonstrating how and why the African coast was side-lined by early European commentators and later by Eurocentric historians. He also pointed out the contributions of local Eastern African communities to the oceanic world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This is also the case in Islamic historiography where scholars make blanket generalizations that almost all prominent traders, brokers, and scholars in Eastern Africa were Arabs and Persians. In Islamic legal history in particular, although it is difficult to distinguish local Swahilis or Zanjis in premodern sources, some scarce but crucial remarks about geographical or familial affiliations or physical features do provide us with a stepping stone towards further enquiries about their intellectual engagements and the implications.

One early reference to an Eastern African jurist in South Asia comes from the account of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the North African traveller who was also appointed judge in Delhi and the Maldives. He wrote in the mid-fourteenth century that he had met one Faqīh Saʿīd from Mogadishu working at Ezhimala (Hilī) in northern Malabar (southwest India). According to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1987: 572), this Somalian jurist had travelled from Mogadishu to both Mecca and Medina, had studied there for 14 years each, and had been in touch with many scholars of the Holy Cities as well as their rulers, Muḥammad Abū Numayy in Mecca (r. 1254–1301) and Maṣṣūr bin Jammāz in Medina (r. 1300–1325). Based on the rulers' terms of reign, we can assume that Faqīh studied in Mecca sometime between the late-1280s and 1300, and in Medina between 1300 and 1315. After his education in Hijaz, Faqīh Saʿīd travelled to India and China, but we do not know what sort of jobs he took at the places he visited. He settled down finally in Malabar in a port-town called Ezhimala, which was frequented by several Chinese ships and had a very active religious sphere. It had an important congregational mosque, a madrasa, and an imam where both Muslims and non-Muslims sought blessings (*baraka*) from the sanctity of the mosque; seafarers made plenty of offerings to it before they set out to sail. The mosque had a rich treasury, under the supervision of the *khaṭīb* Ḥusayn. Several students studied at the mosque, and they received stipends from its revenue. It also prepared food for travellers and the destitute in its own kitchen. Faqīh Saʿīd must have arrived there directly from China since Chinese ships frequented the port (Anchilath 2015; Bouchon 1975). In the city, he collaborated with Ḥusayn, possibly the author of *Qayd al-Jāmiʿ*, one of the first known Islamic legal texts from Malabar (Muhammad 2012: 62–63). It deals with marital rules, proceedings and requirements from the viewpoint of Shāfiʿī school of Islamic law, and its authorship is ascribed to a certain Faqīh Ḥusayn bin Aḥmad al-Mahfanī from the mid-fourteenth century.⁴ We do not have much information about him unfortunately, but the local scholars assume that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's reference here, as well as in a discussion of a miraculous tree found in Malabar, are attributed to this same scholar.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa gives only a short description of this “other African” who had far outshone his own journeys. This likely indicates that Faqīh Saʿīd was not an exceptional case in his time and that there were many similar African scholars who found their way to Asian Islamic communities in premodern centuries.

Relatedly, after mentioning Faqīh Saʿīd, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa immediately talks about another Malabari port-town called Jurfattan, three leagues from Ezhimala, and he makes a comparative statement on the practice of inheritance law among the Malabar and Africans. The context of comparison in the text is interesting as he makes it with regard to an Arab jurist from Baghdad. He writes:

There [in Jurfattan] I met a jurist from Baghdad of high stature, named al-Ṣarṣarī after Ṣarṣar, a place ten miles away from Baghdad on the way to Kūfa. [...] He had a brother in this town with a lot of money which he had asked to give to his young children by will. The deceased person's property was kept in the shipload to Baghdad. The custom (*ʿāda*) of the Indians is like the custom (*ʿāda*) of the Sawdān that they do not interpose in the property of the deceased. Even if the person leaves thousands, his property would remain with the leader of the Muslims until the inheritor takes it according to *sharʿ*.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987: 572–573

The motivations behind his comparison of a regional custom in Malabar with the one in the “Sawdān” (broadly “black Africa,” if we follow H.A.R. Gibb's translation) are very intriguing,

especially as he says that the property of the deceased person finally reaches the legal inheritor.⁵ This implies that many parts of the Islamic world, probably including Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's native place in North Africa, did not follow the "*sharī'a* mode" of preserving inheritance in the absence of an inheritor. Further research is needed to make a conclusive argument, but for the moment suffice to note the potential similarity in the legal practices of Muslims in Malabar/India and Sahel/Western Africa as remarked by a North African jurist who had travelled extensively in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Another important Eastern African who worked in South Asia was Yāqūt al-Ghiyāthī from fifteenth-century Bengal. He undertook a challenging project of establishing law colleges in Mecca and Medina on behalf of a Bengali king of Ilyās Shāhi dynasty, Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh (r. 1390–1411) (al-Fāṣī, 2008: 539–542). We do not have much biographical information on Yāqūt outside the details of his journey from Bengal to Mecca and his incredible activities in the city as told by a Meccan historian who met and wrote about him. But certainly, he was part of a larger Abyssinian community in Bengal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, similar to many more in the whole of South Asia and across the Indian Ocean littoral. Yāqūt was well-versed in navigation, administration and diplomacy – a few matters that became very explicit during his Mecca mission. I have written elsewhere in detail about this fascinating project of legal connections and circulations of people, ideas and money between the Swahili Coast, Bengal and Mecca (Kooria 2019).

Only to elaborate briefly here on Yāqūt, we do not know what his status was in the Bengali royal court. The florid Arabic nouns like *Jawhar* (jewel) and *Yāqūt* (ruby, garnet) were given as distinctive names to the Black African eunuchs and slaves sold in the Middle Eastern markets, and many of them sustained those names even after their manumission (Schimmel 1989: 70–72). Both slaves and ex-slaves had only "a single name without patronymic and without tribal, regional or other cognomen" and sometimes they were called with the *nisba* of their masters (Lewis 1990: 113). From the cognomen Yāqūt therefore it is difficult to identify whether he was a slave, freeman, or an agent of the king. Since Yāqūt was more specifically used to denote the Abyssinian eunuchs, we can assume that he was a eunuch.⁶ The Meccan historian Taqī al-Dīn al-Fāṣī (d. 1429) gives his full name as Yāqūt al-Sulṭānī al-Ghiyāthī, which clearly indicates his connection with Sultan Ghiyāth al-Dīn A'ẓam Shāh (al-Fāṣī 2008: 540). Furthermore, al-Fāṣī praises him by calling him "janāb al-'ālī al-iftikhārī" (his excellency and lord), surely for the ideas and money he brought into Mecca. A'ẓam Shah assigned him with responsibilities to purchase land, to construct appropriate building for law college and to take necessary formal steps in making the endowment legally valid. Yāqūt went several steps further by gathering support from many Meccan elites, many of whom he eventually appointed as professors in the law college, including the historian and judge al-Fāṣī – our prime source on him. After accomplishing his mission, Yāqūt commenced his return to Bengal, but died on his way at Hormuz.

If Yāqūt is an agent of a bequeathing South Asian king, we have also evidence on an Eastern African endower himself from the thirteenth-century Malabar Coast who established a mosque in the port city of Calicut and appointed an imam and caller to prayer with salaries. This evidence comes from a thirteenth-century bilingual inscription kept at the outer-wall of the Muccunti Mosque in Kutticcira, Calicut: one part of it is written in Arabic (in the Naskhi script) and on the other part, in old Malayalam (in the circular script or *vatteluttu*) (see Figure 6.1). The Malayalam part on the left side has been deciphered by M. G. S. Narayanan and M. R. Raghava Varier and they have related it as a grant from the local ruler the Zamorin towards the daily expenses of the mosque (Narayanan 1972: 38–41). Regarding its establishment and maintenance, the Arabic part on the right side provides more details. It has been read

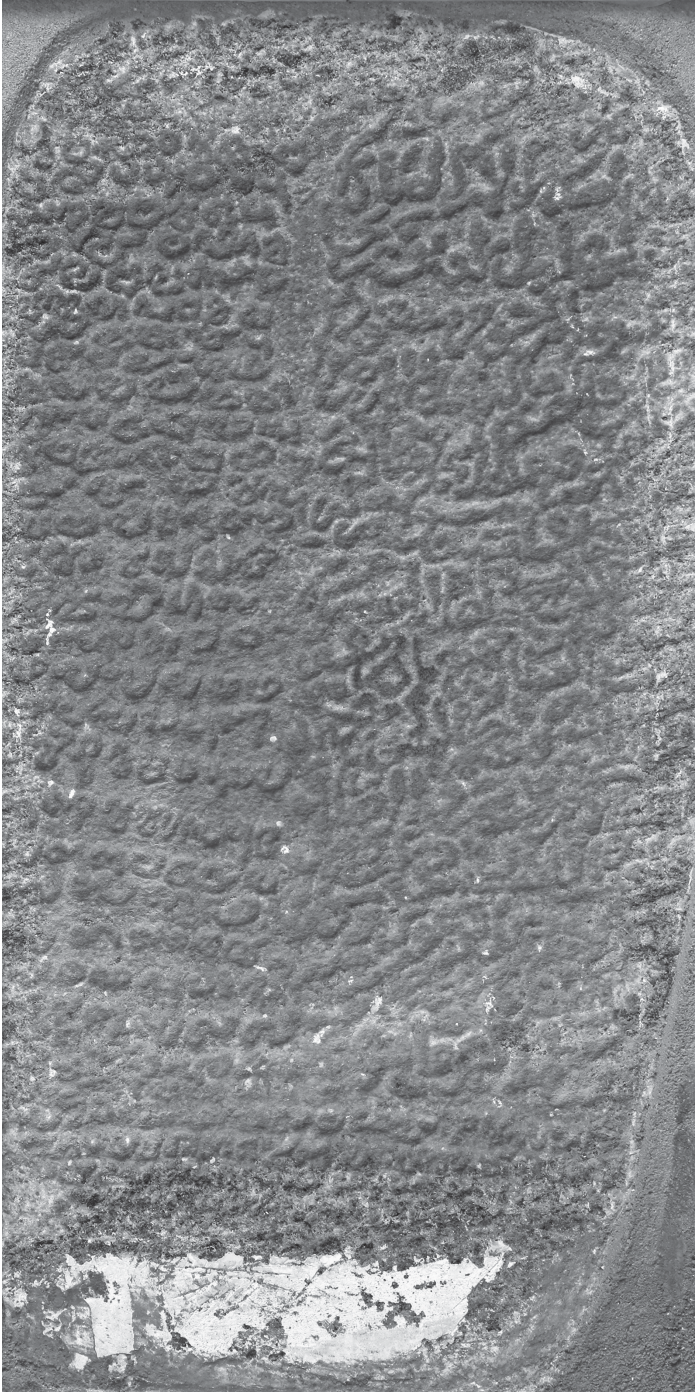


Figure 6.1 A thirteenth-century bilingual inscription (in Arabic and Malayalam) kept at the outer wall of the Muccunti Mosque in Calicut. The Arabic part says that Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān (or Rayḥān), freed slave of the late Maṣūd, endowed the land and commissioned the construction of the mosque. Photo by Aghin Komachi, printed with permission.

by a representative of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the 1940s and a summary has been given in their annual report:

Seems to state that Shihābu'd-Dīn Raihan, freed slave (*ʿatīq*) of the late Masʿūd, purchased (?) land, out of his own money, from its owner and constructed thereon this mosque and well (?) and made (provision) for its leader of prayers (*imām*) and caller to prayers (*muʿadhdhin*) by constructing a big edifice (?).

Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy [ARIE] 1947–1948, B 94;
ARIE 1965–1966, D 58; Desai 1989, no. 1059: 101–102

Many scholars have reproduced this summary without actually looking into the inscription, while some others have not looked at even the summary (*ARIE* 1947–1948 (1949), B 94; *ARIE* 1965–1966 (1967), D 58; for this summary's reproduction see Desai 1989: 101–102; Shokoohy 2003: 194–195). Narayanan, for example, states that the Arabic part contains “a series of Muslim personal names, passages of prayer, and signatures.” In a footnote, he provides the English and Malayalam transcriptions of the Arabic letterings and it bears no relation with the original inscription or its ASI summary.⁷ Against this backdrop of contradiction, I have been trying to reread it with the help of Arabic epigraphist colleagues. But fortunately, Mehrdad Shokoohy, a renowned scholar of South Asian architecture and Arabo-Persian epigraphs, has recently read and published the Arabic part (Shokoohy 2018: 9–11). I agree with most of his reading, although I revise it slightly on the basis of some words or letters as they appear to me:

1. [بنى هذا المسجد]
2. وَحَفَرَ هذا العتيق؟⁸
3. شهاب الدين مرجان؟ / ريجا[ن]⁹
4. ... المرحوم مسعود
- [the lines are almost illegible]
11. ... و اسكنهم
12. لله في الجنة
13. [في] يوم الاخرى ...
14. هذا في سنة
15. ست و ثمانين و ...

1. [built this mosque]
2. and engraved this the former slave
3. Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān
4. ...[of] the late Masʿūd
-
11. ... and may he reside
12. [in] God's Paradise
13. [in] the last day of [the month of]
14. of this year of
15. six and eighty and... .

Shokoohy assumes the last missing part on the century to be six hundred, summing it up to be the Hijri year of 686, corresponding to 1287 CE. This year also relates to the assumption of chronology on the basis of its Malayalam part on the left side. Once we read both parts together, we could understand that the entire project was a remarkable endowment from

an ex-slave-*cum*-trader Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān, and the local king only endowed for its daily expenditures. This ex-slave could and did purchase the land, but the Zamorin also assigned a different landed property for the current and future maintenance.

Marjān must have been a business agent of the late Maṣʿūd, similar to the slave characterized in the *In an Antique Land* of Amitav Ghosh (1993), who became rich after his manumission through maritime trade itself. This Maṣʿūd is possibly the same Abyssinian captain who appears in the Judeo-Arabic Geniza documents a century earlier in the twelfth century. In a Geniza letter sent from Aden to Malabar around 1139, its author, a Jewish merchant based in Aden writes about his unfinished deal with the Muslim captain (*rubḥān*) “Maṣʿūd, the Abyssinian” to whom he had sent some money to procure merchandises from Malabar (Goitein and Friedman 2008: 138, 603–604).¹⁰ Marjān must have worked for this Maṣʿūd during his lifetime and gained his wealth and freedom and managed to establish a mosque in the newly established city of Calicut in the thirteenth century.

Such an activity as construction of a mosque in a religiously remote location like Calicut must have been an act to assert his own status as an independent believer or a pious merchant, as two Ugandans would contribute later to another mosque just four-hundred meters away. Although the inscription does not explicate his ethnicity, the very name is indicative of the place of his origin. Similar to Yāqūt, Marjān (literally, “coral”) is another florid name used for slaves, especially from Abyssinia. He must have taken the common Arabic cognomen (*laqab*, pl. *alqab*) “Shihāb al-Dīn” to indicate his status before or after manumission. According to the fourteenth-century administrative manual of Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (1355–1418), the cognomens similar to Shihāb al-Dīn were commonly given to the Abyssinian eunuch military slaves (Schimmel 1989: 70–71). Specifically, al-Qalqashandī (1919, vol. 5: 489) mentions that the name Zayn al-Dīn (“beauty of religion”) was given to those with names Hilāl or Marjān, Sābiq al-Dīn (“preceding in religion”) for Mithqāl, ‘Izz al-Dīn (“pride of religion”) for Dīnār, Shams al-Dīn (“sun of religion”) for Ṣawāb, Badr al-Dīn (“moon of religion”) for Lu’lu’.

Accordingly, the epigraph enlightens us on an outstanding benefaction from this ex-slave-*cum*-trader to the local Muslim community, and now it stands as an oldest surviving mosque-inscription with one of the solid evidences for the early Muslim settlement in the Malabar Coast. Although the region believes to have witnessed the arrival of Islam and establishment of several mosques in the seventh century itself across the coastal belt, we do not have any concrete evidences on early mosques from the first millennium of Common Era (Kugle and Margariti 2017; Prange 2018). The Calicut mosque and the inscription also demonstrate the interconnections in the thirteenth century between the Muslims and the local rulers in an Indian Ocean shoreline in which the community was not at all dominant or powerful. The reciprocal relationship they maintained with the Zamorin kings helped them strengthen themselves religiously, communally in a richly cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The larger network

Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān, Yāqūt al-Ghiyāthī and Faqīh Saʿīd are three important yet divergent examples of a larger flow of Africans who participated in the making of Islam in premodern South Asia. If Saʿīd represents the group of proper jurists and itinerant scholars, Yāqūt and Shihāb stand for the clusters of agents and endowers who facilitated the intellectual and religious exchanges. There are many more similar Eastern Africans who worked across South Asia during these periods in different roles and positions. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, for example, also talks about one ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Makdashawī who worked as the governor of the island Kannalus in the Maldives. During Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s visit to the island, this Muslim administrator from Mogadishu

“treated me with honour, offered me hospitality and prepared a *kundara* for me” to meet the queen of the Maldives.

Also in the Maldives, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the hospice of Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Najīb at the extremity of the island of Mahal, the seat of the Sultana and her husband, with the captain and Arab judge ʿĪsā al-Yamanī (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 1987: 594). Andrew Forbes identifies this hospice as the Habshīgefānu Magān (“Shrine of the African Worthy”), built in memory of a little-known Shaykh Najīb from Eastern Africa, together with a mosque. Shaykh Najīb travelled in the Maldives teaching Islam to the islanders and died at Karendu Island in Fadiffolu Atoll. The mosque and hospice were located in the precincts of the Lonu Ziyare (“Salt Shrine”), but they were demolished in the early twentieth century (Forbes and Ali 1980; cf. Forbes 1980). We can discern from the name of the shrine that the Shaykh was from Abyssinia (Habshī), but it is difficult to make any conclusions about his origin for the want of solid evidence. The Maldives also had a share of African slaves, and seventy of them were bought in, and brought from, the Hijaz in the mid-fifteenth century by the Maldivian king Sulṭān Ḥasan III. In an interesting course of events, one of these slaves killed a local Maldivian and the *qāḍī* (judge) ordered his execution, but the sultan instead burned the judge at the stake, if we are to believe an account given by Andrew Forbes and Fawzia Ali on the basis of the *Tārīkh Islam Dībā Maḥal*, one of the early accounts of the history of the Maldives written in the eighteenth century by al-Qāḍī Ḥasan Taj al-Dīn (1661–1727) (Forbes and Ali 1980: 19).¹¹

We also come across references to some more Eastern Africans in the mosque inscriptions of the western and eastern Indian Ocean. From Calicut, a city we mentioned above as a place where the former slave Shihāb al-Dīn Maṛjān had built a mosque in the thirteenth century, we have further references to the presence of Eastern African Muslim traders, jurists, benefactors, mercenaries, and slaves. In the mid-fourteenth century, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who visited the city talks about Abyssinian men-at-arms who worked as “the protectors on this sea” in the Chinese ships on the Calicut port as well as the commanders of warships in Barkur on the Konkan coast (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987: 577). “They were the leaders of the sea there. If there was one of them on a ship, it will be protected from the Indian thieves and infidels (*kuffār*)” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987: 564). He also talks about the *nakhudā* Mithqāl who resided in the city, who was “a well-known name and owner of great wealth and many ships to trade with India, China, Yemen, and Persia” (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa 1987: 575). Besides this fleeting reference, we do not have much information on Mithqāl but one of the most iconic traditional mosques still extant in the city is named after him as Mithqāl Maṣjid (Mithqālpaḷḷi). Its exact date of establishment is unknown. It is most likely to be founded in the mid-fourteenth century itself by the same person as we have epigraphic and textual evidences on its existence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: it was destroyed in 1510 by the Portuguese, who set it on fire, and it was rebuilt by the local Muslims in 1578–1579. All this is important when we consider his single name Mithqāl, conventionally given at the time for Abyssinian slaves. Paying attention to the name, Sebastian Prange (2018: 136) has concluded recently,

It is plausible that the ancestors of Nākhudā Mithqāl, if not the man himself, were manumitted slaves [...]. The loss of ancestral references entailed in slavery and conversion may have led this merchant to adopt a nickname, which encapsulated the basis for his economic standing that enabled him to function as a patron of Calicut’s Muslim community.

A few centuries later, although beyond the chronological focus of this chapter, we find more Eastern Africans maintaining and conserving the mosques of the city. Two notables from from

Entebbe in present-day Uganda contributed to the repair and maintenance of the Mithqāl Maṣjid. According to two separate inscriptions, one Khwājah Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Antābī renovated the carved pulpit (*minbar*) of the mosque in 1607/1608 or 1618/1619, and possibly his grandson Khwājah ‘Umar al-‘Antābī repaired it again in 1677/1678 (*ARIE* 1965–1966, no. D53; Shokoohy 2003: 168). In the inscriptions, the former is identified as *tāj al-muslimīn* (Crown of the Muslims) and the latter as *ra’īs al-muslimīn* (Commander of the Muslims) and both of them are identified as *shāhbandar* (Master of the Port), indicating the higher positions they had acquired among the local and translocal oceanic Muslims and mercantile community at large. The title *shāhbandar* is particularly intriguing as it was an official or semi-official position existed across the Indian Ocean and the person in office mediated between the expatriate merchants and the local rulers.

Faqīh Sa’īd, Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān, Nākhudā Mithqāl and the ‘Antābīs all are examples of many more Eastern Africans who arrived in South Asia and became involved in its religious, intellectual, and mercantile circles. Together with them, we also need to look at the contributions of several Habshi and Swahili scholars who worked in the Middle East (especially in Yemen and Oman), and who contributed significantly to the advancement of Islam through their interactions across the Indian Ocean world. The spread, survival, and prevalence of a specific school of Islamic law, that of the Shāfi’ism named after its founder Idrīs al-Shāfi’ī (d. 820), among the Muslims of both Eastern Africa and coastal South Asia indicate to the historical implications of such shared exchanges (Kooria 2016).

Conclusion

The fragmentary episodes from the lives and travels of a few Eastern African individuals demonstrate the multifaceted trajectories of Afrasian cultural and religious interactions between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. What makes the fragmented narratives of these figures interesting is that they challenge the specific set of images typecast on the African communities in premodern and early modern South Asian history as slaves and mercenaries alone. Even though such narratives on African peregrinations for knowledge, law, religion, and philanthropy are forgotten in both public and scholarly memories, they continue to survive in disconnected and patchy evidences encouraging us to re-inscribe their vanished narratives into our understanding of the community and to forefront their unstudied and understudied iterations. As these figures appear sporadically in the travel accounts, epigraphs, architectural complexes, and chronicles, and when we try to uncover them, the primary sources from the past, as well as our descriptive and analytical reading in the present, generate multiple levels of narrativization vis-à-vis the role and agency of these historical subjects.

Their transregional peregrinations demonstrate how mobile these Eastern Africans were, and that is what makes them a strong part of the Indian Ocean community. As we see in the case of Faqīh Sa’īd, Yāqūt and Shihāb al-Dīn Marjān they all travelled from the Eastern African coasts to faraway places: from Mogadishu to Mecca and Medina to China to Malabar (as Sa’īd did); from Ethiopia to Bengal to Mecca to Hormuz (as Yāqūt did). The same goes for several other Eastern Africans in the Maldives. Even if one could argue that Africans like Yāqūt were forced to travel across the seas by their masters or benefactors and that they did not travel voluntarily, the stories of Faqīh Sa’īd, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Makdashawī, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Najīb and many more, indicate that they all probably travelled for their own interests and benefits rooted in intellectual, juridical, mystical, and political aspirations.

I focused here on Eastern Africans who worked in South Asia, but they were part of larger Afro-Asian interactions in intellectual, religious, and legal realms across the Indian Ocean

world. The interactions between Eastern African, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Muslims in the maritime littoral in the premodern centuries enlighten us to the multidirectional and cosmopolitan stratum that contributed to the making of historical Islam and its laws. These “Indian Ocean Muslims” also provide a different lens with which to look at Islamic legal history and they question the existing overemphasis on the Arab exclusivity at the cost of their own roles. “The Indian Ocean Islamic law,” as practiced from Eastern Africa to Eastern Asia, is not a mere mimicking of Arab versions of law and religion, rather it is a historical phenomenon of constant efforts among al-Zanjīs, Swahilis, al-Ḥabshīs, al-Hindīs and al-Jāwīs to rearticulate Islam and its laws according to their contexts. The legalistic interactions among these communities through the circulation of scholars and texts since premodern centuries helped them advance their understandings in different ways. Multiple contexts defined multiple characters and routes with outright contradictions. Yet, they all belonged to one legal cosmopolis of Islam; in it the Africans, Arabs and Asians created an equilateral triangle. The duty of a historian is not to disregard their jurisprudential contributions or to pass judgments on them as less Islamic or un-Islamic; rather, it is to try to understand Islamic law the way *they* understood it.

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Notes

- 1 The Orientalist scholars such as C. Maximilian Habicht and M. Jan de Goeje argued that it refers to Japan; M. Reinaud and many others thought that it is Madagascar; Mac Guckin de Slane believed it was the Seychelles; M. Langlès and L. M. Devic identified it with the islands of Southeast Asia, or more precisely Sumatra, as G. Ferrand suggested. For a survey of these debates, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, sv. “Wākṭāk”; Toorawa 2000.
- 2 For example, on the role of Southeast Asian communities in the introduction of Islam and Arabic script language in Madagascar, see Versteegh 2001; Adelaar 1995. Although from a later period, on the scholarly presences of African scholars in Southeast Asia, see Abushouk 2011; Yamaguchi 2016.
- 3 Different Arab geographers, travellers and chroniclers provide various Arabic names for the ocean in connection with Eastern Africa. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī (575–626/1179–1229) says Baḥr al-Zanj is the Indian Ocean itself (huwa Baḥr al-Hind bi-‘aynih); Maṣ‘ūdī (282–345/896–956) says the same for Baḥr al-Ḥabashī, whereas he limits Baḥr al-Zanj as only the ocean’s western part. In contrast, ‘Abdullah al-Bakrī al-Andalusī (d. 487/1094) calls Baḥr al-Ḥabashī only its western part. However, Maṣ‘ūdī’s use of the term for the entire ocean is persuasive and he uses it all across his text. See Maṣ‘ūdī, 2011, vol. 1: 70–113, 252–267, vol. 2: 281, 300, 335, 432–433; al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī, 1977, vol. 1: 343; al-Andalusī 1945: 381; cf. Devic 1883.
- 4 al-Mahfanī, MSS. Ponnāni Makhdūmiyya Library has two uncatalogued and unnumbered manuscripts with slight variations. Union Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities enlists two other manuscripts belonging to the Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek Köln (5 P 50–01 and 5 P 50–02).

- 5 H. A. R. Gibb (1994, vol. 4: 810) translates the term “Sūdān” as “negros” (from sawdān). It is not the present-day Sudan. The term “Bilād as-Sūdān” in premodern Arabic geographical literature stands for West Africa, what we identify today as the Sahel (Gao, Timbuktu, and the Songhai Empire). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the region that visited between 1346 and 1349 after his travels in India, hence this comparison. I am thankful to Cliff Pereira for this important remark.
- 6 This is not to forget that the name also was used by a Byzantine slave who was a calligrapher (Schimmel 1989: 71).
- 7 Narayanan 1972: 61: *Bismillahi rahmanirrahim layilaha illalah aliludin umarul umarlhum masud hakim malik dinar aliyil mavhud... abdul kadir...*
- 8 Shokoohy reads this word as البئر, but it appears more to be العتيق, which also makes more sense as I shall describe in a while. Also, the ASI report mentions the word العتيق that does not appear in Shokoohy’s reading.
- 9 The ASI epigraphist and Shokoohy read this name as ریحان while the م is clearly visible before ر, as well as the diacritical dot of ج. The ي and its double diacritical dots are not there for it to be ریحان. See *ARIE* 1947–1948, B 94; *ARIE* 1965–1966, D 58; Shokoohy 2018: 10.
- 10 Goitein and Friedman also note that “[h]e was evidently a Muslim” (2008: 153).
- 11 However, an edited and published version of the source does not provide such references to Africa slaves, although it does discuss the murder of a judge by the ruler (Tāj al-Dīn 1982, vol. 1: 15).

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THE MAKING OF QĪZ BĪBĪ IN CENTRAL ASIA'S ORAL SHRINE TRADITIONS

From the Great Lady to a
fourteen-year-old virgin

Aziza Shanazarova

This chapter explores the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg, a female Sufi master active in the early sixteenth century in Bukhara, and its history. It does so by tracing the continuation of people's interest in her legacy and sanctity into the present, and in connection to the reproduction of the *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib*, a devotional work written in the second half of the sixteenth century to expound upon Aghā-yi Buzurg's teachings by her disciple Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr (Shanazarova 2019; 2020). I start by examining the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* ("The Story of a Virgin Girl"), an account of Aghā-yi Buzurg which is largely based on the combination of borrowed elements from the oral traditions narrated at the saint's shrine in Bukhara, and Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr's *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib*. Although the *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib* contains the death account of the saint at an advanced age, in the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*, Aghā-yi Buzurg is depicted as a fourteen-year-old chaste girl who surpasses her contemporary prominent public figure and religious scholar Mīr-i 'Arab. This account, then, reminds us of the importance of female age in the study of women and gender history in Islamic communities (Shanazarova 2019: 140–153). But also, it throws light on the portrayal of Aghā-yi Buzurg as the "Other" in the context of Central Asia in the oral traditions; this is seen as necessary to frame her spiritual victory over Mīr-i 'Arab's authority, as it is narrated in the *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib* (MS IVRUz 8716, f. 178b). The emphasis on Aghā-yi Buzurg's intercessory role on behalf of people living in the vicinity of her shrine – located at the site where she is said to have disappeared, according to the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* – reveals the targeted audience of this narrative, i.e., shrine visitors. Consequently, the second part of the article explores the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg and its history based on the examination of the tombstone, the *panja*,¹ and the *waqf* document endowed to the shrine. Even though there are reports about Aghā-yi Buzurg's tomb recorded in the eighteenth-century Naqshbandī hagiographic compendium entitled *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān* in addition to the *Tarjuma-yi ḥal-i Aghā-yi Buzurg*, this chapter observes the correlation between the revival of the manuscript reproductions of the *Maẓhar al-'ajā'ib* from the second half of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries (Shanazarova 2020: 6–8), and the restoration and development of Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine during the same period in Bukhara. Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine, locally known as that of "Qīz Bībī," is located in

the vicinity of Bukhara, in modern Uzbekistan, and remains a popular site for visitors. The accounts explored in the chapter allow us to see the intricate correlation between the written narratives and oral materials on Aghā-yi Buzurg, in which the Great Lady is turned into a fourteen-year-old virgin, i.e. Qīz Bībī. Not only do these sources demonstrate people's efforts to make sense of Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy over a long period of time, but they also shed light on the development of oral history in general.

The *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*: The story of a virgin girl

The *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* is a short narrative in Persian about Aghā-yi Buzurg recorded in a manuscript dated at approximately the nineteenth century and housed at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, in Dushanbe (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, ff. 2b–10b); neither the date of production nor the name of its author or copyist is recorded in the text. Based on the paleographic features of the manuscript and the date of 1274/1857–1858 recorded by its bookbinder named 'Abd al-Rashīd Qādirī, the cataloger suggests that the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* was likely produced in the nineteenth century (*Katalog vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii nauk Tadzhikskoi SSR* 1974: 343).

This story is of special interest insofar as it fuses elements borrowed from the *Mazhar al-'ajā'ib*, a hagiography devoted to Aghā-yi Buzurg's teachings by her disciple Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr in the second half of the sixteenth century, and the oral traditions told at Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine in Bukhara. According to the catalogue description of this brief text, "this is a story about Aghā-yi Buzurg, [whose] *laqab* is Qīz Bībī, [including] the accounts of her birth, her arrival in Bukhara and her disappearance" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 2b). What is more, this story serves a significant role in linking the written accounts and oral materials on Aghā-yi Buzurg, demonstrating the development of oral history in general, as well as people's efforts to make sense of Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy in particular. This is a window on how local narratives of prominent women have fused with hagiographical accounts.

What follows is a brief account of the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*. The storytellers and narrators relate that during the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809), in the region of Antakya (Antioch) of Rūm (today's Turkey) lived a man named Khwāja Sa'īd (or Khwāja Abū Sa'īd (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, ff. 4b, 8a)) and his beautiful wife, Bībī Sharīfa. They lived together for twenty-one years without being able to bear children, causing them great anguish. One night, after weeping for a long period, Bībī Sharīfa fell asleep and saw in her dream a throne floating in mid-air, on which sat the Prophet Muḥammad surrounded by his four associates (*yār*). The Prophet called her to come closer, and asked what she would like to ask him. Bībī Sharīfa explained how she had not been able to conceive a child in the past twenty-one years of marriage. She asked the Prophet to intervene with God on her behalf to grant her wish to have a child, so that she would not leave this world without offspring (*nash*). Pitying her, the Prophet spat a small amount of his saliva (*āb-i dahān-i khūd*) into Bībī Sharīfa's mouth, and told her that God would give her a daughter who would become one of the fourteen chaste maidens (*ma'ṣūm*). The Prophet added that God would bestow intellectual gifts (*faẓl-i 'ilm*) upon the child, and that all of the angels would descend to Mawarannahr (Transoxiana) in order to take lessons from her. "She will be my child," said the Prophet, who explained to Bībī Sharīfa that every woman who had difficulties, including fertility problems, would resolve them if they fasted for three days in the proximity of her future child (*dar javār-i ū*, i.e., Aghā-yi Buzurg), while performing ten thousand *ṣalāvat* (prayers) on behalf of the Prophet from day to night. "If that woman's faith is firm, she will achieve positive results in three days" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 4b). The Prophet warned that when the child turned fourteen, she would disappear and be buried in Bukhara.

After waking up from her dream, Bībī Sharīfa retold it to her husband, who celebrated the good omen and distributed food (*āb-i āsh*) to honor the Prophet, in addition to reading the Qurʾān from its beginning to end (*khatm-i Qurʾān*). After her dream, Bībī Sharīfa became pregnant.

After nine months, nine days and nine hours, Bībī Sharīfa went into an agonizing labor. In the midst of Bībī Sharīfa's cries, a voice appeared from her belly saying, "Mother, be patient, because God loves those who are patient" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 5a). After hearing the voice, Bībī Sharīfa became unconscious. After regaining her consciousness, a throne appeared in the room, and upon it sat Bībī Fāṭima Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet. Bībī Fāṭima introduced herself to Bībī Sharīfa and informed her that her father, the Prophet, sent her to help Bībī Sharīfa. Then, Bībī Fāṭima told Bībī Sharīfa about all the pain she endured because of the killing of her two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. When the time arrived, Bībī Fāṭima lifted Bībī Sharīfa's skirt and said: "O, beautiful chaste girl, come out from your mother's womb. You will be *ma'ṣūm-i pāk* (pure innocent)" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 7a). As soon as the baby girl was born, she welcomed everyone and engaged in *dhikr*. Bībī Fāṭima ordered the angels to bring water from the fountain of Kawthar, a river in Paradise, with which she bathed the baby girl. Then Bībī Fāṭima instructed Bībī Sharīfa to take good care of her daughter, as she was one of the "friends of God" (*avliyā*). Bībī Fāṭima also reminded Bībī Sharīfa that her daughter would go to Bukhara, where she would disappear. She added that her daughter would intercede (*shafāʿat*) on behalf of those dwelling in the territory surrounding her shrine, to the distance of four *farsakhs* (leagues), on the Day of Resurrection. "She will become known as Aghā-yi Buzurg, and those in need will find solutions to their problems" at her shrine (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 7b). Bībī Fāṭima disappeared after giving her instructions to Bībī Sharīfa.

As a way to give thanks for his daughter, Khwāja Saʿīd built seventy mosques and buildings to dispense water, in addition to providing food and clothing to people in need. When the girl turned four, Khwāja Saʿīd sent her to school (*maktab*). After ten years, when the girl turned fourteen, the Prophet appeared in her dream and left a white pearl in her mouth. When the girl woke up in the morning, she realized that "whatever knowledge there is from the beginning of the world till its end is placed in her heart" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 8a). In other words, the Prophet made known to her all the knowledge of this world and the next (*ʿilm-i dunyā va ākhirat*). Later, the angels came to study with Aghā-yi Buzurg, to gain divine grace and knowledge.

One day a king of the infidels (*kāfirān*) named Qarṭās invaded Antakya and killed all its population, including Bībī Sharīfa and Khwāja Saʿīd. During the massacre, Aghā-yi Buzurg prayed, asking God to save her. As a sign of the acceptance of her prayers, there appeared a cloud that transferred her to the city of Bukhara. As she passed through a desert, an angelic voice came, letting her know that this was her new home. Aghā-yi Buzurg settled in the desert where she engaged in devotion and teaching; about 24,000 angels came to take lessons from her. After she became famous, women from different places started to seek her blessing. "She became aware of any word and wish in a woman's heart, and she helped to realize her intention by praying to God" (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 9a).

In the meantime, a prominent religious scholar, Mīr-i ʿArab (Babadzhanov 1995: 88–102; Schwarz 2000: 119–121), was teaching 12,000 students at the grand mosque of Bukhara when a question emerged that none of the religious scholars could answer. A man named Khwāja Salīm proposed to ask the opinion of the fourteen-year-old Aghā-yi Buzurg, who was living in the desert and who had become widely known as a scholar and as a teacher of the angels. Mīr-i ʿArab sent Khwāja Salīm with a letter containing a description of the problem to Aghā-yi Buzurg, whom he caught in the midst of instructing the angels behind curtains. Once informed of the situation, Aghā-yi Buzurg resolved the question promptly and sent Khwāja Salīm back with an answer. After learning her response, Mīr-i ʿArab expressed astonishment that "there are

such women in the world better than men” (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 10a), after which he sent a marriage proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg. His letter, which he sent with Khwāja Salīm, reads as follows:

O, Qīz Bībī, you became a good scholar. The time has come to marry, as is a prophetic tradition for women (*sunnat-i zanān*). You know it well, and, perhaps you have seen it a lot in the books as well. Kindly accept me as your husband. Do not ruin your life. I will give you a thousand *tanga* as *qalīn* (bride price). Nevertheless, you have the right to choose.

MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 10a

As soon as she read Mīr-i ‘Arab’s letter, Aghā-yi Buzurg informed Khwāja Salīm that Mīr-i ‘Arab brought his death upon himself by sending the proposal. She suggested that Khwāja Salīm hurry if he did not want to miss Mīr-i ‘Arab’s *janāza* (funeral prayer). Once Khwāja Salīm entered the city, he witnessed the tumult among the population provoked by the sudden death of Mīr-i ‘Arab. After confirming his master’s death, Khwāja Salīm informed everyone that Aghā-yi Buzurg had predicted Mīr-i ‘Arab’s death. After performing his *janāza*, they buried Mīr-i ‘Arab inside his *madrasa*. After that, Aghā-yi Buzurg became even more popular, and people from around the world came to visit her. In the end, with divine assistance, Aghā-yi Buzurg disappeared from within her hut. Khwāja Salīm built several structures around her hut, in addition to refurbishing its surroundings, as a sign of his devotion to her. Her shrine became a place with an abundance of divine signs where “anyone in good faith is honored to visit her, and their wishes will certainly come true” (MS IVRTaj 1833/1, f. 10b).

In her dissertation, Gulnora Aminova provides a translation of an analogous version of the *Hikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*, which was published by Zebunisa Rustamjon-qizi in the local Bukharan women’s newsletter under the title of *Qīz Bībī* (Aminova 2009: 8–11), a periodical dedicated to women’s spirituality printed in Bukhara since 1996 in honor of Aghā-yi Buzurg. According to Aminova, Zebunisa Rustamjon-qizi used an unidentified Turkic manuscript as the primary source for Aghā-yi Buzurg’s story, which apparently exists in both Persian and Turkic versions. The Turkic version, which Aminova provides, has minor disparities when compared to the Persian version, the *Hikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* I discussed above. For example, in the Turkic version: (a) there is no mention of Hārūn al-Rashīd; (b) Aghā-yi Buzurg’s parents lived in “Aftoriya” which echoes Antakya; (c) in Bībī Sharīfa’s dream, in addition to his four successors, the Prophet is also accompanied by his beloved wife ‘Ā’isha; (d) fourteen years after the dream narrative, Khwāja Abū Sa’īd and Bībī Sharīfa moved to Bukhara as a result of a flood that destroyed their town; (e) Aghā-yi Buzurg is born in Bukhara with the help of the Prophet’s daughter Bībī Fāṭima; (f) in her dream, the Prophet gives a piece of a date from his blessed mouth to Aghā-yi Buzurg; and (g) after her parents pass away, the angels take Aghā-yi Buzurg to a desert in the vicinity of Bukhara and build a shelter for her, where women from all over the world start coming to receive her blessing. It is notable that the Turkic version lacks the component about Aghā-yi Buzurg’s discovery of a solution to a question that the religious authorities of Bukhara, including Mīr-i ‘Arab, could not resolve. Mīr-i ‘Arab’s marriage proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg and her prediction of his death are also absent. Mīr-i ‘Arab is, in fact, completely absent in the Turkic version, an omission that might have been pursued deliberately, if not necessarily, by its author, as it could have developed over time to save the reputation of Mīr-i ‘Arab as a prominent public figure of Bukhara. Mīr-i ‘Arab is a prominent figure in Bukhara above all because of the presence, in the heart of the city, of the imposing *madrasa* he endowed, known as the *Madrasa-yi Mīr-i ‘Arab*, which is still an acting institution today (Tasar 2017).

Whereas the Turkic version mentioned by Rustamjon-qizi and Aminova is not dramatically different, the Persian manuscript offers more material to assert the spiritual prominence of Aghā-yi Buzurg. This latter narrative, then, brings to the surface several important tropes useful to better understand the position of female saints in Central Asia. First of all, the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* represents Aghā-yi Buzurg as an outsider to Central Asia by placing her origins in the region of Antakya, and as living during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786–809); this is despite the fact that the historical figures of Aghā-yi Buzurg and Mīr-i ‘Arab were active in the early sixteenth century. This could be related to the well-known character of Hārūn al-Rashīd in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, which has always been popular in Central Asia, and, in fact, the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* could be perceived and narrated as one of the tales of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*, except for the reference to Mīr-i ‘Arab.

Such a representation of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s origins is analogous to the oral narratives told at her shrine, although there it is said that she was from Yemen. Perhaps a reference to the possible Yemeni origin of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s father mentioned in the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* (MS IVRUz 8716, ff. 189b–190b) served as a basis for the development of these oral traditions. These oral traditions, merged into the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*, represented her as the “Other” in the Central Asian context, and may have developed over time as a way of interpreting both Aghā-yi Buzurg’s career as a leader of the religious community that included both male and female disciples, and her legacy as a prominent woman who gained the upper hand over the famous public figure, Mīr-i ‘Arab. It was ultimately Aghā-yi Buzurg’s “otherness” that gave her the freedom to hold a position reserved only for male members of religious authority in Bukhara’s androcentric society.

The strange circumstances of Mīr-i ‘Arab’s death caused, apparently, by his proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg, seem to echo his hostility towards her and her followers, as narrated in the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*. Mīr-i ‘Arab’s marriage proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg in the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* mirrors Mīr-i ‘Arab’s marriage proposal to Aghā Ḥabība, one of the disciples of Aghā-yi Buzurg, which in the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* is narrated as having been rejected by the saint on behalf of her disciple. According to Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr, Mīr-i ‘Arab’s resentful feelings towards Aghā-yi Buzurg and her community because of the rejected marriage proposal were among the reasons for his thirst for revenge. Although the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* contains the death account of the saint at an advanced age, in oral traditions Aghā-yi Buzurg is depicted as a fourteen-year-old chaste girl, who becomes the object of the marriage proposal, instead of Aghā Ḥabība. This scenario, of course, required her character to undergo “youthening” from the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* to the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*. Thus, Aghā-yi Buzurg’s “youthening” was a logical development to make her Mīr-i ‘Arab’s potential bride. It is noteworthy that Mīr-i ‘Arab’s opposition to Aghā-yi Buzurg’s mode of religiosity is transformed into his unrequited love in the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*.

The legendary narrative of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s birth and her miraculous disappearance is guided by prophetic instruction from the beginning to end. The *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* relates that Aghā-yi Buzurg was conceived through the blessed saliva of the Prophet, which he put in the mouth of Bībī Sharīfa; this is confirmed by the Prophet who declared that Aghā-yi Buzurg will be “his child.” The oral traditions claiming Aghā-yi Buzurg as a (spiritual) daughter of the Prophet remind us of the dream narrative of Moghūl Khānīm mentioned in the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*, in which the Prophet referred to Aghā-yi Buzurg as “my child *mastūra khātūn*.” The Prophet’s calling Aghā-yi Buzurg “his child” is also recorded in the introductory note to some manuscript copies of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*, which echoes this narrative (MS IVRUz 95, f. 1b; MS IVRUz 2314, f. 1a; MS IVRUz 4416, f. 1b; MS IVRUz 4417, f. 1b; MS IVRUz 6168, f. 1b; MS IVRUz 7209, f. 1b; MS Ganj Bakhsh Library 1451, f. 2).

This suggests that later copyists and readers paid special attention to this particular phrase, which was originally mentioned in the *Maḥḥar al-‘ajā’ib* only once. The last part of the same phrase, i.e., *mastūra khātūn* (chaste lady), plausibly served as a base for the later representation of Aghā-yi Buzurg as a chaste lady, who, in oral traditions, miraculously disappeared when she turned fourteen.

The representation of Aghā-yi Buzurg as being directly connected to the Prophet elevates her status and makes her an even more special and exceptional woman, similar to Bībī Fāṭima and ‘Ā’isha – two women who are highly regarded in the Muslim community. The detailed account concerning Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine and the implicit instructions given to its visitors (e.g., fasting for three days and performing 10,000 *ṣalāvat* in honor of the Prophet if one wishes to conceive a child), and Aghā-yi Buzurg’s promised role as an intercessor on behalf of people dwelling in the territory surrounding her shrine to the distance of four *farsakhs*, demonstrate who the intended audience of this narrative is, namely, shrine visitors.

Aghā-yi Buzurg’s eminence in surpassing Mīr-i ‘Arab in the intellectual realm is of special interest from the gender perspective. The story elevates Aghā-yi Buzurg, who is portrayed teaching the 24,000 angels with ease, above Mīr-i ‘Arab, who is depicted struggling to teach the 12,000 students (i.e., half of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s teaching load). Mīr-i ‘Arab’s amazement at Aghā-yi Buzurg’s intellectual abilities, when she finds a solution to a question that he is unable to answer, is apparent from his “compliment” concerning the existence of such a woman in the world, “better than men.” This surely is not a comment of the historical Mīr-i ‘Arab, but rather a result of the societal perception built on the public memory of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s legacy as a woman who gained the upper hand over the same Mīr-i ‘Arab.

Mīr-i ‘Arab’s marriage proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg, admonishing her not to waste her life by remaining single, reveals a misogynistic way of seeing a woman in the male-dominant society of Bukhara; even if she is depicted as surpassing any man, at the same time it is suggested that she should be under the “protection” of a man in accord with the divine command. Aghā-yi Buzurg’s prediction of Mīr-i ‘Arab’s death attests to the reputation of Aghā-yi Buzurg as a powerful “dangerous” woman. This fits Fatima Mernissi’s discussion of the Islamic marital institutional structure designed to restrain woman’s power (Mernissi 1987: 19). Although in the context of the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī*, Aghā-yi Buzurg is represented as a fourteen-year-old chaste girl, she is represented as superior to a representative of the traditional scholastic religious institution, Mīr-i ‘Arab.

The oral traditions surrounding the figure of Aghā-yi Buzurg narrated by contemporary shrine caretakers to visitors at her shrine also resemble the *Ḥikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* to some extent.² According to the shrine stories, after taking care of orphans for twenty-one years, Khwāja Sa‘īd and Bībī Sharīfa received a divine omen concerning Bībī Sharīfa’s pregnancy. After making ritual offerings to Bībī Seshanba (literally Lady Tuesday, a female saintly figure in whose honor women make offerings on Tuesdays; see Louw 2007: 153–166), Bībī Sharīfa became pregnant, and during her labor three angels named Bībī ‘Azīza, Bībī Maṣṭūra, and Qīz Bībī came to assist her. The three angels washed the baby girl, Aghā-yi Buzurg, in the waters of Paradise. When the girl turned nine years old, she left her parents to live in the desert where she dedicated herself to devotion and to teaching forty girls. One day a prominent public figure, Mīr-i ‘Arab, was asked a question to which he could not supply an answer. Then it was suggested he ask a girl living in the desert for the answer. Being already aware of the situation, Aghā-yi Buzurg greeted the men sent by Mīr-i ‘Arab with a written answer and sent the men back with it before they even descended from their horses. Impressed by her abilities, Mīr-i ‘Arab sent his men again with a marriage proposal to Aghā-yi Buzurg. When his men arrived, Aghā-yi Buzurg informed them of their master’s death and suggested that they hurry back to his funeral prayer.

The supporters of Mīr-i ‘Arab accused Aghā-yi Buzurg of causing the death of Mīr-i ‘Arab and in order to punish her they headed to the desert with troops to take revenge on her. Aghā-yi Buzurg entered her room and pleaded to God to save her life during the turmoil. As a divine sign, Khizr appeared in front of her and helped her disappear in her room; according to some versions, Khizr struck his staff on the ground to open the earth where Aghā-yi Buzurg entered and disappeared. Her room later became the center of her shrine, with a tombstone erected as a sign of her disappearance. Regarding Aghā-yi Buzurg’s forty virgin students, some say that the troops killed them while the students were helping Aghā-yi Buzurg escape, and others say that they were hidden in the nearby locality adjacent to Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine, which became known as *Qirq Qīz* (Forty Virgins).

Oral tradition has turned Aghā-yi Buzurg into one of the typical “chaste” female saints who are usually said to have disappeared into the earth in order to escape death or violation, as in the case of Paraū Bībī, whose shrine is located in today’s Turkmenistan (Tyson 1997: 15–32). Moreover, the *Hikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* and the shrine stories have taken somewhat different paths in re-gendering Aghā-yi Buzurg’s circle of disciples. In the *Mazhar al-‘ajā’ib*, among her followers there are female and male disciples, such as Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr, Amīr Farrukh, and Pīr-i Munchāqī; in the *Hikāyat-i Qīz Bībī* and oral traditions, instead, she is associated with female disciples and angels only. Although it is not clear how and why this re-gendering of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s community took place in oral traditions, it indicates the ways in which people reinterpreted the legacy of Aghā-yi Buzurg.



Figure 7.1 The courtyard of the Qiz Bibi shrine complex. Photo by Aziza Shanazarova.

The shrine of Qiz Bibi

Aghā-yi Buzurg is still honored in oral narratives and shrine traditions within the region of Bukhara in modern-day Uzbekistan. Her shrine, locally known as “Qiz Bibi,” is still active in the district of Jondor, located about 30 km from Bukhara. This shrine plays an important role in the lives of local women who visit it seeking *baraka* (blessing) from its patroness.

In his book on *Varakhsha*, Vasilii Shishkin made a brief mention of the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg. Writing in the early 1960s, Shishkin described the deteriorated state of the shrine constructions due to its being abandoned. Shishkin noted that the shrine was probably developed in the nineteenth century based on a date recorded on the marble tombstone that he read as follows: “This is the honorable and illuminated resting place of Aghā-yi Buzurg. It was written by the repenting slave Niyāz Muḥammad *al-kātib* (scribe) in the year 1231 (1815/1816)” (Shishkin 1963: 135–136). Shishkin also made an interesting observation regarding the figure of Aghā-yi Buzurg, considering her a legendary character

There is a solid foundation to suggest that worshipping “The Great Lady,” (Aga-i Buzurg), known as “The Maiden Lady” (Qyz-bibi), who is described as a daughter of Solomon (“dukhtar-i Suleiman”) in oral traditions, is exactly a cult of the mother-goddess, who played an important role in the pre-Islamic Central Asian pantheon.

Shishkin 1963: 136

The absurdity of this observation, which is analogous to other Soviet scholarship on female saintly figures,³ leaves no need for refutation, but Shishkin's brief and unsubstantiated reference to the oral tradition representing Aghā-yi Buzurg as a daughter of Solomon is of significance because this tradition is not recorded in the earlier sources.

Elizaveta Nekrasova, a Tashkent-based archeologist, also studied the shrine of Qiz Bibi. In her article published in 2001, Nekrasova provided a detailed examination of the structure of Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine complex. According to Nekrasova, the shrine complex is situated on a tract of land amounting to 0.5 hectares and consists of a tomb, a mosque with a portico attached to it, a *chilla-khāna* for a forty-day seclusion, a bathroom with a well, a kitchen, *hujras* (cells), and a cemetery adjacent to the shrine (Nekrasova 2001: 59–62). Following in Shishkin's footsteps, Nekrasova suggested that the surrounding buildings of the tomb were likely developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, whereas the tomb itself could have been built in the late eighteenth century. However, Nekrasova read the date on the marble tombstone as “1223” (1808) contrary to Shishkin, who read it as “1231” (1815/1816). Indeed, the date on the tombstone is not easily readable as seen in the image. One could also read it as “1222” (1807) because the last digit looks like either 2 (۲) or 3 (۳). In addition, Nekrasova provides the date of a *panja* (or *khamisa*). Both sides of the *panja*, notes Nekrasova, bear a date of 1287 (1870/1871) (Nekrasova 2001: 60).

Nekrasova also mentioned that adjacent to the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg were several guest rooms (*mehmān-khāna*), designed for women's use only, which were destroyed in the 1930s. The main purpose of these guest rooms was to physically obstruct the entrance of men to the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg. Aminova confirms Nekrasova's observation regarding a ban on men's entrance to the shrine. However, during both of my visits to the shrine our male drivers were allowed to enter the burial chamber to pray to Aghā-yi Buzurg. It is difficult to know why certain oral traditions and rituals have been discontinued at this shrine; perhaps this is linked to the change of shrine caretakers over time. The other parts of the “women's court,” as put by Nekrasova, were rebuilt in 1913–1914 through the initiation of an unknown patron, who

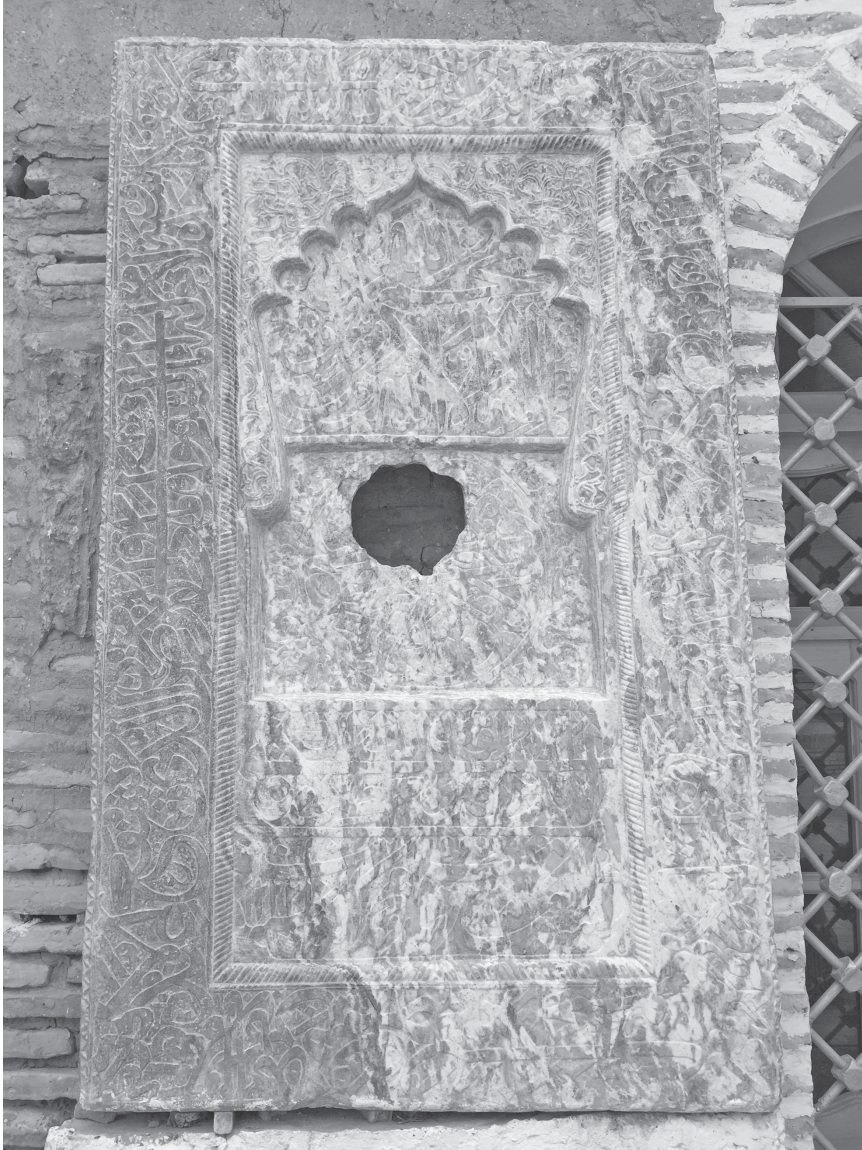


Figure 7.2 The marble tombstone. Photo by Aziza Shanazarova.

built a kiln outside of the shrine complex to fire bricks known as “soldati,” or “European,” for use in the construction (Nekrasova 2001: 60). The remains of this kiln are still present in front of the shrine complex. According to Nekrasova, although a large portion of the shrine was buried under sand until the 1980s, it continued to be a popular site for visitation among the local population.

The oral traditions that Nekrasova recorded include references to (a) Aghā-yi Buzurg’s status as a daughter of Solomon, (b) Mīr-i ‘Arab’s proposal to marry Aghā-yi Buzurg, and (c) the disappearance of Aghā-yi Buzurg at the age of fourteen. Because Nekrasova did not

provide footnotes, it is not clear whether she heard the story of Solomon's daughter herself or might have known of it through Shishkin's article, which Nekrasova listed in her bibliography (Nekrasova 2001: 62).

It should be noted that neither of the above-named scholars mentions a *havž* (pool) located inside the shrine complex, nor did the shrine caretakers whom I interviewed know when the *havž* was built. It is not clear whether the *havž* was added later because of the importance of the *sardāba*⁴ for the community of Aghā-yi Buzurg. During my last visit to the shrine, the mausoleum of Aghā-yi Buzurg had recently been refurbished and was embellished with a new symbolic tombstone adorned with Qur'ānic verses. On both ends of the tombstone one can read the following:

This is the illuminated resting place of Her Holiness, a scholar (*al-'ālīma*), a worker (*al-'āmila*), an ascetic (*al-zāhida*), a devotee (*al-'ābida*), a saint (*al-valiyya*) and a Sufi (*al-ṣūfiyya*), Bībī Rābi'a, known as Aghā-yi Buzurg. According to the account of her [in] the *Manāqib-i maẓhar al-'ajā'ib va majma' al-gharā'ib*, she, may God sanctify her secret, died in 929 [1523], may her soul rest in eternal peace.

The tombstone inscriptions were made by a local scholar, Abdulghafur Razzoqov.⁵ There are a few important parts in the inscriptions that require some comments. First, the name of Bībī Rābi'a is not mentioned anywhere else, including in the known oral traditions; it is not clear what served as a basis for this name. Second, the representation of Aghā-yi Buzurg as a Sufi



Figure 7.3 The *havž* inside the shrine complex. Photo by Aziza Shanazarova.

shows how her modern devotees (such as Abdulghafur Razzoqov, who is familiar with Sufi literature and practice) interpret Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy and role.

Having looked at the secondary sources dealing with the shrine of Qīz Bībī, I now examine the primary sources at our disposal to better understand the history of Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine. The earliest reference to the burial place of Aghā-yi Buzurg is provided in the eighteenth century Naqshbandī hagiographic compendium *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān*. According to the *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān*, the gravesite (*qabr*) of Aghā-yi Buzurg was located in the village of Jān Qilich, also known as Bardīza (or Burdīza), in the *tūmān* (district) of Khayrābād (MS IVRUz 8791, f. 171a). The unknown author of the *Tarjuma-yi ḥal-i Aghā-yi Buzurg* – a short biography of Aghā-yi Buzurg included in a manuscript dated at approximately the second half of the nineteenth century and housed at the Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent – also made a reference to the location of her gravesite: “The blessed grave (*qabr*) of Her Holiness Aghā-yi Buzurg is located in Bukhara the Noble, in the *tūmān* of Khayrābād, in the village of Jān Qilich” (MS IVRUz 3711/IX, f. 213a). Not only do these two texts agree on the location of the gravesite, but they both use the term *qabr* (gravesite) to refer to Aghā-yi Buzurg's burial place. This suggests that Aghā-yi Buzurg's gravesite was not developed as a shrine (*mazār*) at the time the *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān* or the *Tarjuma-yi ḥal-i Aghā-yi Buzurg* were produced.

There is a *waqf* document endowed to the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg. This *waqf* document is housed in the *waqf-nama* collection I-323 of the State Historical Archive of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, *delo* 726. According to the *waqf* document, in the month of Rajab of 1293/July of



Figure 7.4 The recently installed tombstone. Photo by Aziza Shanazarova.

1876, a lady identified as Bībī Rāziya Āy, a daughter of Hājji Muḥammad Bāy, came to the judicial office (*dār al-qaṣā*) of the Khayrābād district (*tūmān*), located in Bukhara, and expressed a desire to make an endowment from her personal funds. She donated “about one *ṭanāb* of land” situated in the locality named ‘Alī Īlī in the district of Khayrābād (The State Historical Archive of Uzbekistan, I-323, *op.* 1, *kn.* 1, *delo* 726). The land is described as surrounded by the property of Khudāyār b. Sharīf Bāy in the west, by the property of Raḥmatullāh Khwāja b. Burhān Khwāja in the north, by a public stream (*jūy-i ‘ām*) in the east, and by the property of Nāṣir Khwāja b. Burhān Khwāja in the south.

The benefactor of the *waqf*, Bībī Rāziya Āy, appointed herself as shrine caretaker and administrator (*mutaṣarrifa*) of the endowment, and named Ya’qūb Bāy b. ‘Aẓīm Bāy, likely her son, to take over the responsibilities of shrine caretaker after her death, which should then pass on to his descendants after his death. Bībī Rāziya Āy laid out several conditions to be followed by the shrine caretaker. Among them was to divide the *waqf* income appropriately: one tenth is secured for the shrine caretaker’s trusteeship (*ḥaqq al-tavlīyat*), and nine-tenths should be spent on *mullās* who retire at the shrine (*i’tikāf*). Although the title of Aghā-yi Buzurg is not mentioned in the body of the *waqf*, which refers to her shrine only as “the shrine overflowing with light” (*mazār-i fā’iz al-anvār*), the title of “*Ḥaẓrat-i Aghā-yi Buzurg ‘alayhā al-raḥma*” is noted on the right-hand margin, leaving no doubt that it belongs to Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine.

The *waqf-nama* collection I-323 houses another *waqf* document, *delo* 718 that is ascribed to the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg in the unpublished catalogue description of *delo* 718:

Falaki Begim, a daughter of Barat, donated 40 *ṭanāb* land for use in the graveyard of Falaki Begim and to read the Qur’ān in the shrine of the donor and in the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg in the city of Bukhara in 1106/1695.

A close reading of the *waqf* document itself makes the reader doubt whether this *waqf* document belongs to the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg or not. According to the *waqf*, in 1106/1695 a lady named Falakī Bīkach donated, from her personal funds (*mulk-i khūd*), 40 *ṭanāb* of land with 100 mulberry trees situated in the locality identified as Ūba Chūlī, through her representative named Niyāz-bakāvul Valad. The donation was made for the construction of the graveyard (*maqbara*) and the stone bench (*ṣufa-yi sangīn*) adjacent to the tomb (*gūr khāna*) of the sponsor in Chahār Bāgh. Falakī Bīkach’s representative named Niyāz-bakāvul Valad is listed as a shrine caretaker (*mutavallī*), and the document also says that in the case of his death, the responsibilities of the shrine caretaker will pass on to his descendants (*avlād*) for five generations. The shrine caretaker is allocated a particular sum of money from the *waqf* income, the amount of which is impossible to read due to the poor condition of the document. The *waqf* makes the shrine caretaker responsible for providing food and bread (*āsh va nān*) to the visitors of the shrine on certain days, including the celebration day of the holy month of Ramadan (*‘īd-i ramaẓān*), the celebration day of the feast of sacrifice (*‘īd-i qurbān*), every Friday of the month of Rajab, and the first day of the month of Ḥamal. The acting sponsor of the *waqf*, Falakī Bīkach, prohibits using the endowment income on government and judiciary officers (*al-ṣadāra va zābiṭāna gūyān*), which signifies the unrestricted position of the female donor in terms of putting restrictions on her endowment. The saying “one who pays the piper calls the tune” could be about Falakī Bīkach, who instructed that “if someone contrary to the conditions of the previously mentioned benefactor (*vāqifa*) will interfere with this *waqf* or will act against its regulations, may Allāh, the angels and all of the people curse him.” However, it is uncertain whether the *waqf* belongs to Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine or not. On the one hand, the title of Aghā-yi Buzurg is not mentioned in the *waqf*, and, on the other, the “inhabitant”

of the shrine is referenced as “*Ḥaẓrat-i quṭb-i falak-i ḥaqīqat, murshid-i rāh-i ḥaqīqat*” (His/Her Holiness the Pole of the True Celestial Sphere, the Master of the True Path). It is not certain whether it is Aghā-yi Buzurg who is referenced by “*Ḥaẓrat*” in the document. Also, there is a note in the margins of the document that reads “*Ḥaẓrat-i Khwāja-yi Buzurg ‘alayhi al-rahma*” which is a well-known epithet of Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, the eponym of the Naqshbandiyya. However, it could also refer to Aghā-yi Buzurg if we disregard the third-person masculine possessive pronoun of the Arabic language “*al-*” in the blessing phrase “*‘alayhi al-rahma*” which usually follows male proper names or epithets. The sloppiness of the handwriting and the deteriorated condition of the *waqf* document make it difficult to read accurately. It is possible that there was a title of Aghā-yi Buzurg mentioned in the text or somewhere else which was available to the cataloger, who created a recording of this *waqf*, before its repair, which covers some parts of the document. If we take the catalogue description of the *waqf* at face value, then we are dealing with the earliest document, aside from the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*, that recorded the activities involving Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine in the late seventeenth century (The State Historical Archive of Uzbekistan, I-323, *op.* 1, *kn.* 1, *delo* 718).

Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra, in his 1910 shrine guide for pilgrims to the city of Bukhara titled *Tuhfat al-zā’irīn*, included an account of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine which is mostly paraphrased from the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*. The only valuable information that Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra added regarding the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg is that it was located about three [*far*]*sangs* (leagues) from Bukhara (Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra 1910: 133), which would equal about 17 km. It is also worth mentioning that Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra did not refer to the shrine as the shrine of Qiz Bībī, nor did he cite any oral traditions about Aghā-yi Buzurg circulated at the shrine. Instead, he referred to it as the “*mazār-i munavvara-yi Haẓrat-i Aghā-yi Buzurg*” (“the illuminated shrine of Her Holiness Aghā-yi Buzurg”) (Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra 1910: 133). Taking into account that Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra published his shrine guide in 1910, it could suggest that the oral traditions were developed later in the twentieth century, or simply that Nāṣir al-Dīn Tūra was not interested in such traditions.

Let us put together the important dates that we have seen so far concerning the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg: the tombstone date of 1222 (1807) or 1223 (1808), depending how we read the last digit; the date of 1287 (1870/1871) inscribed on the *panja*; and the *waqf* document issued in 1293 (1876). These dates would appear to confirm the suggestions of Shishkin and Nekrasova regarding the development of the shrine complex in the nineteenth century. The *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān* and the *Tarjuma-yi ḥal-i Aghā-yi Buzurg* refer to the burial place as a gravesite (*qabr*) which may indicate that the burial place was not developed as a shrine (*mazār*) in the first half of the eighteenth century when Ṭāhir Īshān was active. Perhaps Aghā-yi Buzurg’s grave was known, at least, in the eighteenth century, but was not developed into a shrine complex until the nineteenth century. However, the question as to why the shrine was developed in the nineteenth century, several centuries after Aghā-yi Buzurg had died, has yet to be explained.

In addition to the development of the shrine of Aghā-yi Buzurg in the nineteenth century, we also notice a surge of interest in the production of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib*. Out of fourteen existing copies of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* (Shanazarova 2020: 7–10), six of them were manuscript copies produced in the nineteenth century,⁶ and five of them were produced in the early twentieth century.⁷ There should also be a correlation between the active copying of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* in Khayrābād⁸ and the location of Aghā-yi Buzurg’s shrine in this district. Thus, there is a certain parallel between the production of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* and the development of the shrine in the nineteenth century. The date of the tombstone, 1807 or 1808, shows that the shrine started developing in the early nineteenth century and continued growing until the early twentieth century. This might suggest that the revival of the reproductions of the *Maẓhar al-‘ajā’ib* from the second half of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries is connected

to the restoration and development of Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine in Bukhara. There is no satisfying answer to the question as to why this sudden interest in Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy began to flourish several centuries after her death. However, it could be related to the fact that the *silsila* passed down through the author of the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib* Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr, which survived in Khwarazm, returned to Bukhara in the second half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, the descendants of Ḥāfiẓ Baṣīr's disciple Amīr 'Alī, who were active in Samarqand and Bukhara, could have played a significant role in the resurrection of interest in Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy, and in the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib*, which was indeed dedicated to Amīr 'Alī (Shanazarova 2021).

Conclusion

Although Aghā-yi Buzurg's tomb was already known in the eighteenth century, as indicated in the *Tadhkira-yi Ṭāhir Īshān*, the present chapter has argued that the restoration and development of the shrine complex is linked to the revival of the reproductions of the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib* from the second half of the nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries in Bukhara. I have shown how the figure of Aghā-yi Buzurg went through different phases of reinterpretation over time. In contrast to the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib*, in which female sanctity is taken for granted, the oral traditions, albeit echoing the accounts in the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib*, celebrate Aghā-yi Buzurg emphasizing her sanctity and spiritual powers. Not only do these accounts demonstrate the continuation of people's interest in Aghā-yi Buzurg's legacy to the present, but they also allow us to observe “the making of Qīz Bībī” in the oral traditions. Visitors to her shrine are often reminded of Aghā-yi Buzurg's superiority in her struggle with Mīr-i 'Arab, whose grandiose *madrasa* is a popular touristic site in today's Bukhara. It is no wonder that in modern Uzbekistan, Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine is seen as offering proximity to the saint's *baraka* and is still actively visited.

Notes

- 1 A palm-shaped amulet attached to a horse hair standard known as *tūgh*.
- 2 Aminova recorded the oral traditions at Aghā-yi Buzurg's shrine in her dissertation from 2009 (Aminova 2009: 3–5). During my visits to the shrine complex in the summer of 2014 and in the winter of 2016, I also interviewed different shrine caretakers and recorded the interviews. The oral traditions that I recorded are comparable to Aminova's materials, although there are some variations.
- 3 For instance, another saintly woman, 'Anbar Anā, was described as a goddess of fertility by Soviet ethnographers, who also represented 'Anbar Anā as the incarnation of Anakhita, the ancient goddess of fertility, healing, and wisdom (Snesarev 1969: 240–241, 244–247; Basilov 1970: 11; Abramzon 1971: 277).
- 4 Although the term *sardāba* is usually used in the Central Asian context to designate a locality where cold water is stored, it is described as a meeting point of Aghā-yi Buzurg with her close associates in the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib*.
- 5 Abdulghafur Razzoqov is one of the authors and editors of the recently published series on architectural epigraphy of Uzbekistan (Razzoqov, Rahimov, and Nekrasova, 2013).
- 6 Among them are the following: MS IVRUz 4689 copied in 1819, MS IVRUz 7209 copied in 1868, MS IVRUz 13040 copied in 1873, the “Bukharan copy” copied in 1877, MS IVRUz 88 copied in 1894 and MS IVRUz 95 copied in 1897.
- 7 Among these copies are MS IVRUz 4416 copied in 1901, MS IVRUz 4417 copied in 1901, MS IVRUz 83 copied in 1906, MS IVRUz 6168 copied in 1909 and MS Ganj Bakhsh Library 1451 produced in 1909.
- 8 Among the manuscript copies of the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib* made in Khayrābād are MS IVRUz 4416 (with a possibility of MS IVRUz 95 which was copied by the same person who copied MS IVRUz 4416), MS IVRUz 6168 and MS Ganj Bakhsh Library 1451. The list could be longer as the rest of the copies of the *Maṣḥar al-'ajā'ib* do not provide detailed accounts of the location where the copies were made, with the exception of the one referencing the city of Bukhara.

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8

THE ISMAILIS OF BADAKHSHAN

Conversion and narrative in highland Asia

Daniel Beben

Introduction

The renowned historian of Central Asia, Yuri Bregel, once characterized the region as a “double periphery”; that is to say, on the one hand, it constituted a religious boundary demarcating the northern edge of Islamic civilization, while on the other hand it also served as a socio-economic boundary, marking the border between a largely agrarian civilization to the south, defined chiefly by the urban centers based along the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins and their tributaries, and the nomadic and semi-nomadic communities of the steppes, deserts, and mountains to the north and east (Bregel 1980: 1). One of the defining aspects of the historical development of Islam in Central Asia is found in the evolving relationship between these boundaries. For about two centuries following the completion of the Arab conquests in the mid-eighth century, the edges of these two peripheries more or less corresponded, as the extent of Islamization remained largely confined to the sedentary regions of southern Central Asia, while the cities of this region – including Bukhara, Samarqand, and Balkh – emerged as major centers of Islamic scholarship (Frye 1975). It was not until the tenth century, under the rule of the Samanids, that we begin to see the earliest signs of conversion to Islam in the steppes and in areas beyond the sedentary regions of Central Asia (Tor 2009). From there, the process of Islamization progressed rapidly and by the fourteenth century we find evidence for the spread of Islam as far north as Siberia and Mongolia (DeWeese 2019: 147–149; Frank 1994). By contrast, the socio-economic divide between the sedentary and pastoral-nomadic regions of Central Asia remained largely in place until the nineteenth century or later.

The story of Islam in Central Asia, as elsewhere, is the story of the spread, adaptation, and acculturation of this religious tradition to a wide and diverse range of different cultural and socio-economic contexts. There are many differences between the processes of Islamization that occurred in these different contexts, both in the varieties of factors that drove the process itself, and in the types of social outcomes that resulted from it. In this chapter, I focus on one of the latter aspects, namely the issue of how Islamization was remembered and commemorated in these regions where Islam spread after the Arab conquests; and, in turn, I also explore how these forms of commemoration might inform us as to the actual process of Islamization. One of the chief aspects of the commemoration of Islamization in Central Asia is the presence of

what I term communal conversion narratives, or narratives that purport to describe how a large group or community converted to Islam more or less at the same time. While narratives of conversion to Islam among both groups and individuals are a nearly universal feature of Muslim traditions across the world (Hurvitz et al. 2020), there are certain unique features to many communal conversion narratives emerging from rural areas of Central Asia and other Muslim communities in Asia that formed beyond the frontiers of the early caliphate, or in regions that were not subject to the Arab conquests. One of these distinctive features, as I will outline here, is that these narratives often purport to account not only for the Islamization of the community, but also for the formation of the community itself.

In the first part of this chapter, I offer some reflection on why certain patterns of Islamization may have generated this particular genre of narrative. Following that, I examine the role performed by communal conversion narratives within the religious life of Muslim communities in Central Asia, and will pursue some methodological considerations regarding the use of conversion narratives as historical sources. From there I turn to examine three examples of conversion narratives among the Ismaili Shi'i communities of the mountainous Badakhshan region. The Ismailis offer an interesting case for the study of Islamization and conversion narratives: in contrast with much of the broader Muslim tradition, for which we find little evidence of organized "bottom-up" missionary endeavors in premodern times (Kuiper 2018), the Ismaili tradition from an early period maintained an intentional and well-organized effort focused on conversion, known as the *da'wa* or "summons," and concurrently produced a significant body of literature dedicated to the topic of conversion. However, as I will demonstrate here, the narratives produced by Ismaili communities commemorating their own conversion often bear little resemblance to the idealized model of conversion presented in the *da'wa* literature, and instead betray a much closer resemblance to the conversion narratives maintained among neighboring Sunni communities in Central Asia. Ultimately, I argue that the structural parallels demonstrated among these different narrative traditions point to underlying commonalities in the types of social processes that catalyzed Islamization outside the sedentary "core" of the Islamic world.

Community and conversion in Central Asia

The Arab conquests in Central Asia extended the territory of the caliphate to the northeastern edge of the realm that Marshall Hodgson referred to as the "Nile to Oxus" region, referring to the two rivers that roughly marked the outer boundaries of what he termed the "Irano-Semitic cultural zone" of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East. This is a region that maintained a long history of settled societies and traditions of state formation, of which the caliphate was only the latest iteration (Hodgson 1974). While conversion to Islam in these regions did eventually occur as a consequence of conquest, a generation of scholarship on this topic has now demonstrated that conversion in fact was not an immediate or even intended outcome of the conquests. Rather, the process of Islamization was a very slow and gradual one that was driven by a complex array of demographic, economic, and political factors (Peacock 2017).

By contrast, in the steppes and other rural areas of Central Asia where Islamization occurred after c. 900, processes of state formation tended to be periodic rather than successive, and often occurred in reaction to external impulses. In many such cases, religious conversion played a critical role in the process of state formation, as local elites adopted new religious affiliations in an effort to obtain support among neighboring sedentary states for their own state-building enterprises (Golden 1990; 1998; Khazanov 1994). Islamization across the frontier was also driven by merchants and other groups that had contact with Muslim communities, which

suggests that Islamization initiatives among local elites may have emerged at least in part as a response to Islamizing dynamics within their own societies as well (Amitai 2008; Hatcher 2007). A much broader process of Islamization occurred in the steppe after the Mongol conquests, as numerous new non-Muslim peoples were ushered into Central Asia through the conquests and came into social contact with extant Muslim communities. It was from the synthesis of this social mixing in the wake of the Mongol conquests that many of the communal conversion narratives in Central Asia have their origin.

There are, of course, many narratives related to conversion that are maintained among Muslim communities in the Nile to Oxus region, such as accounts of how Islam was introduced to particular towns, or stories associating prior connections between Islamized communities and the Prophet Muhammad (Azad 2013; Hanaoka 2016; Savant 2013). Many such cases may be found even at the village level (Frye 1960). These types of narratives have many elements in common with the conversion narratives under consideration here, as we will see. However, what I have termed here “communal conversion narratives” emerge more specifically from circumstances in which the process of Islamization is concomitant with that of social formation; in other words, I refer to cases in which religious conversion itself plays an integral role in the ordering and re-ordering of new group identities. As such, the narrative explains not just the Islamization of the community, but the origins of the community itself. These types of narratives, I argue, tend to emerge primarily from regions and communities outside of the sedentary, agricultural “core” of the caliphate that did not have established traditions of state formation. I will now turn to offering a closer look at the structure of these narrative traditions and their significance for the study of Islamization in Central Asia.

Conversion narratives in Central Asia

Communal conversion narratives from Central Asia typically entail four key elements or stages (DeWeese 1994): first a holy person, usually a Sufi and/or a figure of sayyid or ‘Alid ancestry, arrives from abroad. In many cases, the coming of this individual is preceded by some manner of premonition or prior knowledge among elements within the local community of the holy person’s reputation, or of Islam more generally, which sets the stage for their arrival and intervention. Secondly, the holy person arrives to encounter some problem or tension within the community. This tension may be represented, for example, in the form of an illness that defies efforts at treatment by local specialists. In other cases, notably in the Ismaili narratives examined in this chapter, the “problem” manifests in the form of an oppressive tyrant that terrorizes a local community. Third, the holy person engages in some manner of contest or demonstration of prowess that favorably resolves the problem, after which the community adopts Islam. Lastly, the saint becomes conjoined to the community in some organic fashion, most typically by marriage.

The social conjunction that marks the conclusion of the narrative initiates an enduring association between the saint and the community that is continued in the form of a genealogical lineage. Within the conversion narrative we can typically detect an agenda towards legitimizing the privileges enjoyed by members of this lineage or of some other constituency that claims a connection with the Islamizing saint. In this regard, communal conversion narratives may be read as akin to origin myths supplying a social charter. As instances of mythology, communal conversion narratives require a special form of care when consulted as historical sources, both for their limitations and explanatory potential. In general, the study of Islamization in Central Asia and elsewhere suffers from an extreme deficit of source material for approaching its subject. In many cases, we are reliant upon no more than a handful of travel accounts for

understanding centuries' worth of developments. Furthermore, these communities generally lacked any internal tradition of written documentation, and Islamization itself marked the advent of textualization in many of these societies. Accordingly, it was oftentimes not until well after the Islamization process was underway that the earliest documentation reflecting on that process was produced. As such, despite their many limitations, communal conversion narratives in many cases constitute the earliest and most extensive form of documentation available for understanding the events they describe.

The role of Sufis in conversion narratives

In order to better understand how we might approach conversion narratives as sources for the study of Islamization, we must first examine more closely the identity and role of the agents who serve as the primary actors in these narratives, who are typically presented as peripatetic holy persons or Sufis. In one sense, the notion of Sufis as missionaries and preachers of Islam accords with a well-worn conception – in the western study of religion which takes Protestant Christianity as the normative model – of conversion as the outcome of engagement with scripture and “the word,” and concluded by a change in inner conviction and belief (Nock 1933). The application of this conception of conversion to the Islamic world was reflected already over a century ago in Thomas Arnold's work, aptly titled *The Preaching of Islam* (Arnold 1896), which relied upon a rather literalist approach to the study of communal conversion narratives. By the later twentieth century it had become increasingly recognized that this Protestant-informed model of conversion had little relevance for explicating the process of Islamization (Levtzion 1979). Accordingly, the field of Islamic studies primarily turned to quantitative or archival-based approaches for the study of conversion, in which conversion narratives performed only a supplementary role (Bulliet 1979; Dennett 1950).

In the study of Central Asia, earlier generations of scholars assumed that missionizing Sufis played a key role in the early spread of Islam among the rural and nomadic populations of the region. This was often based on the assumption that Sufis, being somehow less committed to normative interpretations of Islam, were able to simplify and convey complex doctrinal ideas to unlettered nomads in an accessible and easily digestible fashion; furthermore, it was argued that Sufis may have borne a resemblance to the shamans of the nomads and hence served as a sort of “bridge” between the two traditions that facilitated conversion, albeit to a distinctly heterodox and superficial form of Islam (Köprülü 2006). Similar paradigms dominated previous studies of Islamization in regions including South and maritime Southeast Asia, as Sufis were seen as mediators between Islam and the extant Hindu–Buddhist substratum (Eaton 1985; Ernst 1992; Johns 1993). A major breakthrough in the study of conversion narratives came with the study by Devin DeWeese on the conversion of Özbek Khān, the Mongol ruler of the Golden Horde, in which he challenged a wide range of previous assumptions regarding the place of Islam in Inner Asia and demonstrated the possibilities provided by such narratives for understanding the process of Islamization and its inherent connection with community formation (DeWeese 1994).

Recent scholarship has conclusively demonstrated the lack of evidence for involvement by Sufis in the spread of Islam in Central Asia in the pre-Mongol era (DeWeese 2017; Paul 2008). However, this situation changes after the Mongol conquests, when we do begin to see clear signs of Sufi involvement in this process. Despite this, we still find no evidence that missionary models of conversion inherited from the Christian tradition played a significant role in the Islamization process. How, then, might we understand the role of Sufis in the spread of Islam? An increasing body of both historical and anthropological research suggests

an alternative mechanism: that it was not through merely preaching to local communities that Sufis affected Islamization, but rather through the social and familial bonds formed with them. A range of case studies from various regions and historical periods of the Islamic world have noted a widespread phenomenon in which Sufis, sayyids, and other individuals belonging to “sacred” lineages perform duties of mediation and social reconciliation within segmentary societies (Bang 2003; DeWeese 1996; 2018; Eaton 1978; Gellner 1969; Green 2006; Tapper 1984). In many cases, these lineages are explicitly ascribed origins from outside of the community and their members retain a privileged status as “outsiders” that stand above or beyond other social groups. Their position as cultural brokers thereby enabled them to mediate disputes and conflicts either within the community itself or between the community and external groups.

Not coincidentally, it is precisely this role as a mediating outsider that is often highlighted in portrayals of Sufis in conversion narratives, in which the presence of the “problem” and its subsequent resolution symbolize the broader process of social reconciliation and reconstruction that the saint and their lineage facilitate. This phenomenon of the mediating holy outsider who becomes a dynastic founder is an example of a much broader phenomenon referred to by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins as the “Stranger King” (Sahlins 1985: 73–103; 2008), which maintains that kinship bonds formed between local communities and outsiders formed the basis for political formation in many areas across the world. While the Stranger King thesis has thus far been largely employed in studies of Oceania and Southeast Asia (Henley 2004), its potential for explicating the process of religious conversion in that region and elsewhere has begun to be explored as well (Strathern 2007). In Central Asia, the phenomenon of the Stranger King served as a catalyst for Islamization in the wake of the Mongol conquests, when the disruptions and dislocations resulting from the conquests created ripe conditions for this model of social intervention.

The key element to this process is that the Islamizing outsider does not remain fully an outsider for long, but rather marries into the community and establishes a sacred lineage that continues to inhabit and perform their social roles for generations thereafter, serving as an ongoing exemplar and embodiment of the Islamic tradition. In many cases, this legacy is also reflected within the built environment, in the form of a shrine housing the founding member of the spiritual dynasty (and who, it is believed, continues to exert agency within the community from the grave). The job of caretaking of the shrine typically is also assigned to the founder’s lineage, serving as a visible marker of the lineage’s ongoing responsibility within the community. Accordingly, this tripartite structure of conversion narrative—shrine—lineage formed the bedrock of the religious life of much of premodern Central Asia, and in many ways continues to play an essential role among communities in the region even today (Abashin 2005; Louw 2007).

One of the most informative features of the communal conversion narrative is also found in what the narrative does *not* depict about the process of conversion: namely, the notion that conversion must necessarily be preceded by the learning of religious doctrine or performance of ritual acts. This depiction reflects the fact that, in Central Asia, the spread of Islam was facilitated by the influence of the *murji’a*, a theological position that held great sway among Muslim scholars of the region in the pre-Mongol period, which maintained that a mere declaration of faith, as opposed to demonstration of knowledge or ritual performance, was sufficient for one to be recognized as a member of the Muslim *umma* (DeWeese 2011: 722–723; Madelung 1982). This is one reason why we see that, in many narratives from Central Asia, the act of conversion is marked not by teaching or instruction, but rather by a declaration on the part of the converted of their intention to enter the Muslim community, only after which

are they instructed in matters of ritual and doctrine. As we will see, this model of conversion contrasts sharply with what is often presented in the literature of the Ismailis, to which we will now turn.

Ismailis and conversion in Central Asia

The Ismaili Shi'is offer an interesting case study for the process of Islamization in Central Asia, as the tradition idealizes a model of conversion that, in many respects, diverges quite drastically from the broader historical model of Islamization in the region. The Ismailis first emerged as a distinct movement within the broader Shi'i community in the eighth century, following a dispute over the question of succession to the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 765). Between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, the Ismailis held political power in a number of regions, first under the Fatimid dynasty with its capital in Cairo, and then later at the fortress of Alamūt in northern Iran, which served as the headquarters of the Ismaili imamate until its capture by the Mongols in 1256. The Ismaili imams supervised a far-reaching missionary endeavor known as the *da'wa* or “summons” (Daftary 2007: 211–233). Agents of the *da'wa*, known as *dā'īs*, produced a significant body of scholarly literature dedicated to the topic of *da'wa* and conversion during this period. The image of conversion that emerges from the *da'wa* literature is that of a highly intensive, individual experience, one that entails a long period of study under the guidance of a *dā'ī*, who leads the disciple through graduated levels of initiation culminating in their full admission to the community (al-Yaman 2001). The model presented in this literature suggests that the *da'wa* was often directed at educated members of the Muslim community. A number of high-profile *dā'īs*, such as Nāšir-i Khusraw (discussed further below), were themselves converts to Ismailism from other Islamic traditions and left autobiographical accounts of their conversion that reflect the intensive process of study and self-exploration leading to conversion that is described in the *da'wa* literature (Beben 2017: 320–321). This idealized model of conversion presented in the Ismaili sources, emphasizing a necessary role for the acquisition of knowledge in completing the process of conversion, is one that stands in sharp contrast to the *murji'a*-influenced model embraced by other Muslim communities in Central Asia.

In many respects, the notion of conversion as the outcome of an intensive process of personal search and realization presented in the Ismaili *da'wa* sources harmonizes well with the Protestant-influenced model found in much of the western literature on conversion. Accordingly, to date, the literature and autobiographical conversion narratives produced by members of the *da'wa* have served as the primary source of information for scholarship on conversion within the Ismaili tradition. However, there has been insufficient attention paid to considerations of genre and audience in connection with the *da'wa* literature (Beben 2017). As Ryan Szpiech has demonstrated in the case of medieval European narratives, autobiographical conversion accounts were often fashioned and intended to serve as polemics in inter-confessional debates, but have been frequently misinterpreted in scholarship as providing a descriptive rather than a normative account of conversion (Szpiech 2013). Furthermore, when surveying the social landscape of Ismailism, it becomes immediately clear that the idealized model of conversion presented in the *da'wa* literature could have only accounted for a very small fraction of the historical instances of conversion to Ismailism. This is particularly true for the period after the Mongol conquests, when the Ismailis no longer enjoyed the political prominence of earlier centuries and were forced to operate under much more precarious conditions and were subject to frequent persecution (Virani 2007). By the sixteenth century, Ismailism had almost entirely

disappeared from the regions of the Middle East that had served as its institutional centers in the pre-Mongol era, while simultaneously also spreading to many new areas further to the east, chiefly in Central and South Asia.

As a result of these developments, the vast majority of the Ismaili population of the world today is descended from communities that converted only after the Mongol conquests. Despite this, scholarship continues to primarily look to the *da'wa* sources of the pre-Mongol era as a guide for understanding the role of conversion within the Ismaili tradition. Yet there is significant reason to question the extent to which this body of literature can serve us in explaining the historical spread of Ismailism in the post-Mongol era. Nearly all of the conversions to Ismailism that have occurred since the time of the Mongol conquests have been in more “peripheral” and rural areas of the Islamic world – chiefly in the highlands of Eastern Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia, and on the margins of the Gangetic plain in India – among predominately non-literate and nomadic or semi-nomadic populations. Furthermore, conversion to Ismailism within these regions was often concomitant with conversion to Islam itself. The *da'wa* literature presents us with rather limited insight into how conversion to Ismailism may have worked in such contexts.

The historical arc of the Ismaili presence in Central Asia illustrates these broader dynamics that I have outlined above. During the tenth century, the *da'wa* experienced a remarkable if brief period of success in the major urban areas of Central Asia, culminating in the conversion of many high-ranking officials within the administration of the Samanid dynasty, who ruled the region at that time (Beben 2017: 324–325). However, this brief effervescence was met with a series of violent repressions and by the end of the tenth century the *da'wa* had almost entirely disappeared from this region. The next phase of Ismaili history in Central Asia began with the prominent Ismaili convert and author Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 1070), who was appointed as a *dā'ī* to his native region of Balkh by Imām Mustanṣir bi'llāh I (d. 1094). Nāṣir was later forced to flee from Balkh due to opposition to his missionary work and took refuge further to the east, in the region of Badakhshan, an area within the Pamir Mountains covering present-day north-eastern Afghanistan and eastern Tajikistan, where he was given protection by a sympathetic local ruler. It is to this region and its conversion narratives that we now turn.

Ismaili conversion narratives from Badakhshan

The region of Badakhshan remained, for much of its history, on the periphery of major empires, and experienced a rather slow process of Islamization (Beben 2017: 325–329). While a Muslim presence is attested in the region as early as the eighth century, at the time of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's arrival there in the eleventh century it still retained a predominately non-Muslim population in the rural areas and maintained a significant non-Muslim population well into the post-Mongol era. An extensive body of legends and hagiographical traditions developed in later centuries crediting Nāṣir with the conversion of the inhabitants of the region to Islam. Yet the available historical evidence suggests that the size of the Ismaili community established by him was likely quite small; rather, it was only after the Mongol conquests that Ismailism began to spread more widely throughout the Pamirs and into neighboring regions (Beben 2018). As such, the formation of the Ismaili community of Badakhshan as it exists today was a lengthy and complex process entailing a multitude of agents.

While Ismailism flourished in many of the major political and cultural centers of the Islamic world in the pre-Mongol era, the regions where it has survived down to the present are ones, such as Badakhshan, that historically were on the margins of states. That being the case, even

though the ideals that informed the model of conversion in the Ismaili tradition may have differed quite significantly from other Muslim traditions, for understanding its spread we can profitably look to parallel examples of Islamization among other rural and “state-less” communities in Central Asia. In the case of the Ismailis of Badakhshan, their historical experience of persecution and their survival in a mountainous environment provide the context for understanding how this social process may have unfolded. James Scott has highlighted how highland regions such as the Pamirs have historically served as a zone of refuge for communities seeking to avoid the impositions of the state (Scott 2009). While writings on Badakhshan have often depicted the region as a sort of pristine Shangri-La with a largely autochthonous population, genetic evidence instead points to the region being populated by successive waves of migrants from lowland areas (Peng et al. 2018). It is clear that the promise of autonomy from neighboring states was at least one important factor in the decision by many communities to reside within the Pamirs, despite the manifold challenges posed by life in this highland environment (Kreutzmann 2015).

It is within this context that Ismaili *dāʿīs* may have first found an opportunity for intervention as Stranger Kings, providing a source of social cohesion among disparate groups while also mediating between local communities and outsiders. The need for such mediation remained an ongoing concern down to the twentieth century, as Badakhshanis continued to experience marginalization and were frequently victims of the Central Asian slave trade (Beben 2017: 135–137; Eden 2018: 79–80). Data from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the commencement of colonial archives allows for a much fuller picture of social life in the Badakhshan region, demonstrate that local representatives of the Ismaili *dāʿwa*, known as *pīrs*, served an important role as mediators and advocates for the local population with both Sunni rulers and colonial states (Iliiev 2013; Khodzhibekov 2015; Mastibekov 2014). Their capacity to perform such roles was enhanced by their claims to status as *sayyids* (and hence, as outsiders to the local community), which was articulated through a range of genealogical documentation (Gross 2018).

As I have noted above, scholarship on conversion within the Ismaili tradition has thus far focused primarily on the doctrinal sources produced by the educated elite within the community as a guide for understanding the process of conversion, while largely ignoring the popular narratives emerging from communities reflecting on their own conversion. At best, popular conversion narratives have been taken as evidence for identifying the main actors responsible for the spread of the *dāʿwa*, even as the details of the actions of these same actors as related in the narratives are dismissed as ahistorical (Ėlʿchibekov 2005; Kalandarov 2004). My analysis of the narratives that follow will take a decidedly different approach, as I argue that efforts to mine these narratives for historical data points will generate rather limited insight into the process of conversion. As we will see, of the three primary figures who feature in the narratives that follow, only one, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, likely had any historical connection with the spread of the Ismaili *dāʿwa* in Badakhshan. On the contrary, I would suggest that the names and other details appearing in these narratives are relatively less important for understanding the process of conversion than the social roles and relationships that they portray. From this perspective, these narratives can provide insight into the “plausibility structure” inhabited by the Ismaili communities of Badakhshan (Berger 1990). That is to say, the activities of the Islamizing saints portrayed in these narratives, while clearly reflecting hagiographical motifs, were nonetheless informed by the experience and expectations associated with holy persons in the listeners’ own time. It is on the basis of this plausibility structure that we can suggest a model for how such holy persons may have contributed to the social processes of conversion. I will now turn to

an analysis of three cases studies of communal conversion narratives within the Central Asian Ismaili tradition that illustrate this model.

‘Alī’s battle with Qahqahah

Of the key features of communal conversion narratives among the Ismailis of Badakhshan is that all of them, to one extent or another, demonstrate engagement with conversion narratives maintained among other neighboring Muslim communities. This engagement is in clear evidence in the first of our examples, which is associated with the figure of ‘Alī, the first Imam of both the Ismaili and Twelver Shi‘i traditions. Despite his integral connection with the Shi‘i traditions, it is important to note that ‘Alī is also a widely revered figure among Sunnis throughout Central Asia and beyond, both for his status as the fourth “rightly-guided” caliph and because of his familial relationship with the Prophet (Bernheimer 2013; Formichi and Feener 2015). Among the most famous signs of the popular admiration for this figure in Central Asia is the shrine attributed to him in the city of Mazār-i Sharīf, in present-day northern Afghanistan (McChesney 1991). Therefore, stories connected with ‘Alī in Badakhshan reflect not only his status within the local Ismaili Shi‘i tradition, but also the influence of the broader religious environment.

There are a number of traditions throughout Badakhshan that are associated with Imam ‘Alī in popular narrative. Several of these traditions have been examined in the work of Abdulmamad Iloliev, whose research focuses particularly on the Wakhān region (Iloliev 2008; 2015; 2018). One example is associated with the ruins of an antique fortress in the Wakhān valley near the village of Namadgut, whose construction has been dated to the era of the Kushan Empire (from the first to the fourth century CE). According to this local tradition, at the time of the Prophet Muhammad this fortress was the seat of an oppressive fire-worshipping king named Qahqahah, who was a member of the race of the “black-clad infidel” (*kāfir-i siyāhpūsh*) whose ancestors hailed from Kabul. The story begins by relating how a servant in the employ of Qahqahah escaped and fled to Arabia, where he informed the Prophet of his master’s cruelty and begged for his support in overthrowing him. In response, the Prophet sent an army under the command of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, who historically was renowned for his leading role in the early Arab conquests. However, Khālīd fell victim to Qahqahah’s trickery and his army was slaughtered. In response, the Prophet sent ‘Alī who, through a series of contests with Qahqahah and his men, finally succeeded in defeating and killing him. In doing so, ‘Alī was covertly assisted by one of Qahqahah’s lieutenants named Mubāshir, who promised to help ‘Alī if he agreed to spare the life of Qahqahah’s daughter, who he intended to marry. Following ‘Alī’s victory over Qahqahah, the people of Wakhān converted to Islam and ‘Alī appointed Mubāshir as the new ruler of the region. The people of Namadgut and the surrounding region trace their ancestry through Mubāshir and the daughter of Qahqahah.

This account clearly displays the chief elements of conversion narratives that I outlined above, beginning with the element of foreknowledge of Islam, demonstrated here by the servant of Qahqahah who was aware of the Prophet’s mission even before the arrival of Islam in the region, and concluding with the narrative of contest and conversion. Although there is no historical basis behind a visit by either Khālīd ibn al-Walīd or ‘Alī to Central Asia, much less to Wakhān, Iloliev argues that the narrative may preserve some historical memory of events associated with the Arab conquests of Central Asia. While it is not entirely unlikely that this may be the case, there are also multiple aspects of the narrative that suggests that it may have also been informed by more recent events. The earliest attestation of this narrative is found in

the form of oral traditions that were collected by European travelers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as a small codex that was evidently composed around this same time. This was a time when much of Badakhshan had come under Afghan rule, which subjected the Ismailis to high taxation and frequent slave raids. This period, known commonly in local tradition as the *Zulm-i Afghān*, or “Afghan oppression,” is still remembered bitterly in historical memory today and served as one of the prime motivators for the Badakhshani Ismailis to seek the protection of the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century. Hence, the description of Qahqahah as having his origins in Kabul, which appears anomalous in the context of the seventh century, makes much more sense in the context of late nineteenth-century Badakhshan, when an association between oppressive rule and Kabul would have appeared quite intuitive to listeners. The context of Afghan domination also likely informed the presence in the narrative of the figure of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, reflecting an earlier tradition, attested from the seventeenth century, crediting him with the Islamization of the Afghans.¹ The Ismaili narrative thus demonstrates a form of narrative reversal, in which this hero of the Sunni Muslim tradition is shown to be ineffectual, leaving his work to be completed by ‘Alī.

Like many conversion narratives from Central Asia, the story of ‘Alī and Qahqahah concludes by providing an origin myth for a local kinship tradition. Here the narrative offers a unique twist on the motif of the social conjuncture between the Islamizing saint and the local community, one which serves as a common trope in conversion narratives from Badakhshan. In many cases in which the “contest” element of the conversion narrative entails the defeat and overthrow of an oppressive ruler, there is often some manner in which the familial legacy of that ruler is nonetheless preserved and conjoined with the saint, thereby demonstrating the redemptive promises of Islamization. In some cases, this is symbolized by the Islamization of the ruler himself, whose conversion marks a turn to just and legitimate rule. In other cases, it is achieved through the marriage between the saint and the ruler’s daughter or sister, who is often shown to have been a secret supporter of the saint before the ruler’s defeat/conversion. This gendered component of Islamization also reflects a key element of Sahlins’ framework of the Stranger King through what he terms “the gift of woman,” who bridges the divide of distrust and foreignness between the community and the stranger (Sahlins 1985: 74). In some Ismaili narratives, such as those involving Imam ‘Alī, the “joining” between the saint and the local community is affected by proxy, as the saint commissions one of his trusted acolytes to marry into the community. As we will see, this feature plays a key role in other conversion narratives as well, representing a key device by which the process of social joining and Islamization is affected. This narrative element is clearly reflected in the next example that we will examine.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Malik Jahānshāh

The second narrative tradition I examine here comes from the body of conversion narratives associated with Nāṣir-i Khusraw. One of the more common stories from this body is one that relates Nāṣir’s arrival in Badakhshan and his conversion of a ruler by the name of Malik Jahānshāh, who becomes one of Nāṣir’s chief disciples, taking on the new name of ‘Umar Yumgī, and initiates his own lineage of Ismaili *pīrs*.² In earlier versions of this account, Malik Jahānshāh is shown to be a sayyid and a sympathetic ruler who welcomes Nāṣir and provides him shelter from his persecutors. In later iterations, he is demonstrated to be a monstrous, oppressive ruler who, in one version of the narrative, daily consumes a plateful of human eyes that have been disgorged from his unfortunate subjects. This presentation of Malik Jahānshāh would appear to echo the legends of the evil serpentine king Zahhak of Iranian mythology and

recalls as well the broader array of Islamization legends from Badakhshan, such as the aforementioned account of ‘Alī and Qahqahah, in which the spread of the *dā’wa* is associated with the defeat and redemption of unjust rulers.

The version of this narrative presenting Malik Jahānshāh as a just king first appears in sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as an element in the biographical tradition associated with Nāṣir-i Khusraw, while the version presenting him as an evil ruler is first attested only in the late nineteenth century. Hence, we can trace the development of the narrative from an aspect of the legendary biography of Nāṣir-i Khusraw into a conversion narrative. In one iteration of the “evil king” version of the narrative, echoing a theme from the earlier account concerning ‘Alī and Qahqahah, the sister of Jahānshāh is shown to have been a secret devotee of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, in violation of her brother’s orders (Beben 2015: 403–407). After Malik Jahānshāh’s conversion and transformation into ‘Umar Yumgī, Nāṣir facilitates the marriage of one of his other disciples, named Khoja Āfāq, to Jahānshāh’s sister, thus supplying the origin account of the lineage of Ismaili *pīrs* of the Shākh-dara region of Badakhshan. Accordingly, in its fully evolved form, the narrative inhabits the same structural logic as other communal conversion narratives, reflecting broader public understandings of the social relationships that informed the Islamization process.

Shāh Khāmūsh and the coming of Islam to Shughnān

Finally, we also find echoes of these same themes in the conversion narratives associated with a semi-legendary figure by the name of Shāh Khāmūsh, who is said to have traveled to Badakhshan at some indeterminate time in the past (with suggested dates ranging from the twelfth to the sixteenth century) and to have established a tradition of sacred kingship in the Shughnān region (Beben 2018; Gross 2013). His name first appears in a sixteenth-century source, in which he is claimed as an ancestor by the Timurid rulers of Badakhshan (Nithārī Bukhārī 1377 Sh./1999: 64), and then later as the mythical founder of the local Sunni dynasty that came to power in the Shughnān region starting in the seventeenth century and ruled the region down to the early twentieth century. While his name appears in a number of genealogical contexts in earlier sources, the earliest narrative accounts of his biography do not appear until the late nineteenth century.

As with the previous example, in the case of Shāh Khāmūsh we also find, broadly speaking, two versions of his biography. While both of these versions are attested only in very late sources, nonetheless circumstantial evidence suggests a similar arc of evolution between them. The first and probably earlier version is one that is closely associated with the ruling dynasty of Shughnān, whose members remained Sunni even as the majority of their subjects eventually converted to Ismailism. The most extensive account of this version of the biography of Shāh Khāmūsh is given in an early twentieth-century account of the ruling dynasty of Shughnān composed by a Sunni author (Badakhshī and Surkh-Afsar 1997: 118a–126b). The author writes of Shāh Khāmūsh as a sayyid from Isfahan who became a companion to the renowned Sunni Sufi shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī (d. 1166) and a spiritual disciple to Junayd Baghdādī (d. 910), who commanded him a dream to travel to Khuttalān, a region bordering on Badakhshan, in order to spread Islam there. In the course of his travels Shāh Khāmūsh first came to Shughnān and cured the daughter of the local ruler. In gratitude, the ruler granted his daughter in marriage to Shāh Khāmūsh, who then proceeded in converting the people of the realm to Islam and established a tradition of sacred kingship within the lineage of his descendants. Following this, Shāh Khāmūsh traveled on to Khuttalān, where he likewise intermarried with the ruling family and settled there.

Other versions of the account of Shāh Khāmūsh appearing in an Ismaili context reflect the motifs that we have seen among other such narratives within the Ismaili tradition. The earliest known attestation of an Ismaili version of this tradition is found in the work of the British author Thomas Gordon, who traveled through Badakhshan in 1876 and related an account of how Shāh Khāmūsh came to Shughnān and initiated a “religious war” against the oppressive ruler of the region, also known as Qahqahah, following which he converted the people of the region to Ismailism (Gordon 1876: 141). Further versions of this story are found in a number of other Ismaili sources as well, with some specifying that Shāh Khāmūsh went on to adopt and later marry an orphan girl from the family of the deposed rulers (Muḥammadzāda and Shāhzāda 1973: 3). Accordingly, both the Sunni and Ismaili versions of the story of Shāh Khāmūsh demonstrate the key features of the communal conversion narrative, while also revealing sharply contrasting understandings of the connection between Islamization and communal identity. The Sunni narratives concerning Shāh Khāmūsh display an effort to seek continuity with the pre-Islamic past, demonstrating the pre-Islamic rulers of Shughnān as receptive to the message of Islam and employing the benign device of healing, rather than confrontation as the principal mechanism by which conversion is affected. By contrast, the Ismaili narratives, in common with the other traditions examined in this chapter, understand Islamization as a radical rupture associated with the establishment of justice and entailing a fundamental reordering of society.

Conclusion

One of the central considerations that emerges from the study of these and other conversion narratives, is that of what constitutes “conversion” itself, of what steps are necessary in order for a person or group to be rightfully considered as members of the Ismaili or Muslim community. The model presented in the Ismaili *dāʿwa* literature emphasizes the necessity of acquiring knowledge and professing correct belief prior to conversion. The conversion narratives considered here offer a contrasting perspective, in which the motif of the “contest” marks the moment of conversion, with instruction in the faith occurring only afterwards. The repeated appearance of this motif in such narratives may help us to understand how the process of conversion was understood among local communities: namely, that it constituted, first and foremost, a reordering of social relationships rather than a change in “belief.” This is not to suggest, of course, that matters of doctrine and theology were considered to be unimportant for local Ismaili communities. To the contrary, the accounts of early Russian visitors to Badakhshan report being astounded at the degree to which these unlettered mountain peasants understood many of the finer points of Neoplatonic thought propounded in the writings of Nāṣir-i Khusraw and other Ismaili authors (Bobrinskiĭ 1902; Semenov 1912). The key point, however, is that this understanding undoubtedly emerged only after generations of instruction at the hands of the local Ismaili *pīrs*, certainly long after the “conversion” of these communities was understood to have been affected.

To be sure, the disparity demonstrated between the model of conversion presented in the *dāʿwa* literature and that found in local narratives does not require that we abandon the former as irrelevant for understanding the process of conversion within the Ismaili tradition. It does, however, call for a revision in how we understood the historical role of this literature within the Ismaili community. Rather than providing a practical guide for conversion, these texts more likely were intended to serve as a means of boundary maintenance, encouraging members of this oft-persecuted community to consider themselves as belonging to an elect group with access to secret and superior knowledge (Beben 2019; Hollenberg 2016). In other words, the

dā'wa literature can provide insight into the ongoing process of socialization that occurred subsequent to the foundation and conversion of the community, but not necessarily into the earliest phase of its formation. For this, in the absence of other contemporary evidence, communal conversion narratives provide one of our best sources of insight into how this earliest phase unfolded. The fact that the Ismaili narratives bear such a strong structural resemblance to those maintained among other Muslim communities in Central Asia suggest certain similarities in their experiences of conversion, framed by underlying factors within the socio-economic environment in which this experience took place. Accordingly, conversion narratives can offer a unique source of insight into the factors underpinning the remarkable spread of Islam, in its full variety of forms and interpretations, across Asian frontiers and beyond the borders of the caliphate.

Notes

- 1 For the earliest account of this tradition see al-Haravī 1960–62: vol. 1, 76–112. This tradition is also reflected in a number of nineteenth-century European accounts; see Bellew 1880: 15–16; Ferrier 1858: 4.
- 2 My discussion here is distilled from a range of manuscript sources and oral traditions from Badakhshan. A fuller study of these sources is in preparation. For preliminary remarks see Beben 2015: 373–376, 403–410.

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9

ISLAMIC LAW IN XINJIANG

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Introduction

Xinjiang, or East Turkestan, offers a number of interesting empirical and analytical questions for scholars of Islamic law, as well as a set of intellectual and conceptual difficulties that have persistently beset the field. Such difficulties relate to the region's geographical position: it was historically tied closely to West Turkestan or Central Asia, in that the majority of Xinjiang's people have spoken Turkic languages and participated in the greater Persianate cultural system. Islam entered the region from the west via the southwestern oasis of Kashgar in the tenth century CE, displacing Buddhism and other faiths through a gradual march eastward. History generally dates the completion of the region's Islamization to the submission of the Idikut Uighur kingdom centered on Turfan in the fourteenth century. Throughout this period, and into the eighteenth century, its people maintained a close relationship with Muslims in the Ferghana Valley and South Asia, while participating also in the politics and commerce of China-based states to the east. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Qing empire (1636/1644–1912) conquered the region, and it has since remained more closely attached to China-based states. In the closing decades of the Qing (1877–1912), this separately ruled Inner Asian territory was appended to China proper as a province, and it formally held this status through the early twentieth century under the Republic of China (1912–1949). During that time, Xinjiang province was a largely independent political entity (1912–1933), then a Soviet satellite (1934–1949), and twice home to independent Turkic Muslim republics (1933–1934, 1944–1949) before it was incorporated into the People's Republic of China in 1949. It was established as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, providing nominal self-determination for its autochthonous Uyghur majority. While scholarship has rarely engaged closely with Islamic law in this later period, evidently under the assumption that it gave way entirely to Qing imperial law and its successors, the sources instead suggest a story of its resilience, evolution, and persistence.

The history of Islamic law in Xinjiang followed these political changes, as each altered the status of Islamic law, its institutions, and its relationships with ruling states. Shifts in power, particularly in the Qing and twentieth century, affected how people represented and institutionalized Islamic law, which in turn defined the intellectual problems of studying it in the present. Put simply, the relationship between Islamic and Chinese law and legal institutions remains the central problematic of the scholarship. Its central questions and empirical realities

have both been shaped by a fraught colonial relationship between Muslim people and Chinese power not so dissimilar from that surrounding Islamic law under European empires. This relationship includes the privileging of non-Muslims' representations of "Islamic law," which simultaneously present it as a totalizing and mysterious force and as a limited realm of quaint local custom. That is now changing as scholars reorient their investigations away from sources describing Islamic law from without to Arabic-script sources from within.

This chapter traces the history of Islamic law in Xinjiang and of scholarship on it in China and abroad. It begins with known history from Islamization through the eighteenth century. It then outlines the changes that took place in Islamic law under the Qing and the Republic of China, the periods that have attracted nearly all scholarly attention on this topic. This chapter also presents known sources, which to my knowledge have not been described together elsewhere. It discusses the problem of identifying "Islamic law," the ways that scholars have selected and used sources, and their analytical frameworks. Finally, it closes with some remarks on the afterlife of Islamic law in the People's Republic.

The early Islamic period in Xinjiang (tenth century–eighteenth century)

The conquests of the Central Asian Qarakhanid state established Islam in the region later called Xinjiang around the end of the tenth century. Because there are few known legal sources from this period, it is helpful to infer from the example of the broader Qarakhanid realm, where the Ḥanafī school was highly influential (Aykan 2019: 3; Biran 2001). Because the Qarakhanid conquest of East Turkestan was contemporaneous with their influence, we can safely assume that their ideas also dominated among the region's new Muslim rulers as they established legal institutions. Despite chronicles' presentation of the Qarakhanids as fierce enemies of the infidels, East Turkestan, like West Turkestan, remained home to a number of religious traditions. Later, the Qara Khitai ruler Kuchluk Khan oppressed Muslim scholars during his rule over the region in the early thirteenth century. Juvaynī (1958: 70, 74) in the *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy* later identified those scholars as Ḥanafīs.

Meanwhile, Islamic law gradually displaced pre-existing legal traditions. A few documents from Yarkand dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries indicate that some division already existed between the popular use of Islamic law as a framework for conducting transactions, as demonstrated in documents written in Turkic and often in Old Uighur script, and more formal writing by *qāḍīs* (judges) in Arabic (Erdal 1984: 160–262; Gronke 1986; Huart 1915; Tekin 1979–1980). This evidence suggests that shariah was already broadly established.

Scholarly knowledge of Islamic law in this region from the Mongol conquests, through the Chaghatay Khanate (1226–1347) and its successors in Moghulistan and Turfan, through the Yarkand Khanate (1514–1705) is limited, largely because the available sources mainly comprise court-centric chronicles. However, some things can be inferred. Haydar Dughlat, a member of the ruling house, wrote in 1546 against deviance from Ḥanafī jurisprudence and praised adherence to it (1996: 262, 271). According to the chronicle of Shāh Maḥmūd b. Mīrzā Fāḍil Churās written in 1676, the later state certainly made a distinction between matters of shariah, which were sent to *mufṭīs* and *qāḍīs* for consultation, and those that fell within the Mongol *yasa* (or *törä*), which were handled by the *amīrs* (military commanders) (Churas 1976: 160–161). It was probably in this era that works of jurisprudence from South Asia were introduced to this Moghul court in Yarkand through its connections with cousins in the Mughal Empire (Thum 2018: 1, 21–22).

Several sources, including a set of royal decrees dating from 1600 through 1677, previously interpreted as "judicial documents," attest to the importance of *waqf* in this period (Eden

2015: 237–241; Kim 2010: 59n1). A 1558–1559 deed of endowment (*waqfnāma*) especially points out the close interconnection of Islamic institutions in East Turkestan with those in West Turkestan, such that the history of Islamic law in this period cannot be told properly without regard for both regions. Pious endowments, belonging to shrines, inns, schools, etc., arguably remained some of the most significant landholders through the early twentieth century, pointing to a high degree of institutional continuity (Schluessel 2018).

The first several centuries of Islamic law in Xinjiang have left scattered evidence. Textual research shows that Ḥanafī jurisprudence dominated so thoroughly that it did not otherwise merit any particular mention in the sources, and it does not appear that any special innovations were introduced in the ideas or institutions of Islamic law in Xinjiang at this time that might have differentiated them from jurisprudence as practiced in the rest of Central and South Asia.

Qing and Early Republican Xinjiang (1759–1933)

The overwhelming majority of scholarship on Islamic law in Xinjiang concerns the Qing and the post-Qing condition that pertained in Early Republican Inner Asia. This era can be divided into three distinct periods: indirect imperial rule (1759–1864), a Muslim rebellion and state (1864–1878), and the abortive normalization of Xinjiang as a province (1877–1933). This section will treat each period in turn.

High Qing Xinjiang (1759–1864)

The Qing empire incorporated East Turkestan as a territory in a lengthy conflict with the Zunghar Khanate that ended in the 1750s, at which point it began to be referred to as “Xinjiang,” or “new territory.” In the early period (1759–1864), local officials administered the region on behalf of the empire, under the supervision of a military governor, and largely according to Islamic law. This period of relatively loose-rein government by a confident and plural empire can be called the “High Qing.” However, the Qing integration of local Turkic Muslim officials called *begs* and disruption of pre-existing patterns of patronage and cultural production evidently prompted the translation of Arabic- or Persian-language legal texts into local Chaghatay Turkic in a process of vernacularization (Sartori 2020). Meanwhile, the demands of government led to complex relationships between Islamic and imperial law and administration.

Modern Chinese scholarship on Islamic law began in earnest in the 1980s, and it focused heavily on the High Qing (Bai 2019: 126).² However, the field was generally plagued by basic problems of conceptualization and analytical approach, and most work consisted of armchair ethnography rooted in superficial readings of Chinese sources. Prior to Wang Dongping’s landmark 2003 book (later updated and reissued in 2014), Chinese scholarship had mainly used terms from premodern Chinese-language sources to identify categories of Islamic law (Wang 2014: 32–33). Yet Chinese travelers and officials’ accounts were not only fragmentary, but problematic and misleading in that they invoked meaningless or imaginary distinctions, for example “The Muslims have punishments, but no statutes or substatutes” (Schluessel 2020: 83). The writers of those sources were themselves attempting to fit their observations into a tradition of textual scholarship that traced all phenomena to ancient and medieval, in this case pre-Islamic, sources. Moreover, scholars’ theoretical framing considered most practices that did not fit into a preconceived notion of Islam to be “relics” of pre-Islamic religion, or dehistoricized folkways inherent to an ethnic group. Qing textual scholars and modern historians conspired across time to represent law as mere “local custom.”

Even the question of whether or not Islamic law was practiced in the region was considered open until Wang pointed out an abundance of evidence that disputes were resolved through shariah, and also that council-type courts (*maḥkama* or *dār al-quḍāt*) made of up of multiple jurists operated across the region (Qundūzī, f. 270b; Wang 2014: 255–258). While other Chinese scholars of law have not taken up Wang’s approach of using Arabic-script sources, the focus of research has nevertheless shifted to local archives.

This shift has helped to clear up several longstanding misconceptions. One such misconception was that, during the period of indirect rule, Islamic and Qing law were entirely separate, with Islamic law handling “civil” disputes and imperial law “criminal” cases (Wang 2014: 31–43, 131–140, 244–247, 255–292). It is clear from archival evidence that Qing officials could become involved in legal and judicial matters on multiple levels. The *begs* were routinely involved in dispute resolution and law enforcement, and indeed the regional administrative hierarchy included “*qāḍī begs*” (Ch. *hazi boke*) who possessed imperial ranks and were officially tasked with managing “all judicial affairs” (*yiqie xingming shiwu*). By the dawn of the nineteenth century, *qāḍī begs* holding the seventh to fifth ranks (*pin*) were appointed to 25 cities and towns. Beyond the “court” setting, the Qing also appointed *muḥtasib begs* to inspect and regulate markets, transforming a role that under Islamic law concerned public morality and economic fairness into one focused on state concerns. Islamic judges were therefore not excluded, but to a certain degree bureaucratized, although the details of their integration have yet to be explored.

It was generally true that the Qing Code applied to cases of a certain severity, including capital crimes, while Islamic officials mediated smaller disputes over property, marriage, etc. However, a strict division between “civil” and “criminal” law neither accurately represents the conceptual frameworks of Qing law or shariah, nor captures Qing practice in Xinjiang. Turkic Muslim *begs* regularly mediated disputes and prosecuted violent and capital crimes. Moreover, disputes over property, marriage, etc., frequently involved Turkic-speaking adjutants from the military administration. The adjutants’ role in mediating local commercial disputes was eventually formalized, meaning that Islamic judges and imperial military officials worked closely to maintain order. Meanwhile, civil administration on the model of China proper was established in Turfan (Tulufan) and Qumul (Hami). Chinese legal specialists, such as coroners trained to examine wounds, operated within those areas and throughout the territory. Out of this complex environment emerged the *Imperial Commissioned Regulations of the Muslim Borderland* (Qinding Huijiang zeli), which combined administrative regulations with rules for managing legal pluralism. However, it was precisely this work that led to much confusion for earlier scholars, who read abbreviated references to this work that called it the *Muslim Statutes* (Huili) or *Muslim Laws* (Huili) as indications of a distinctive legal code or tradition specific to Muslims. Recent scholarship has further explored the complex relationships between legal actors and “Muslim statutes” in the imperial judicial process (Jia 2019).

A number of sources for Islamic law in Arabic, Persian, and mainly Chaghatay are known from the Qing period, but they have received scant scholarly attention. Overall, known sources show great similarity to Ḥanafī jurisprudence as practiced elsewhere in Central Asia and in India. Catalogs indicate that the majority of manuscripts held in regional libraries and archives are simply common works on inheritance: most are Arabic or Persian copies of *al-Fatāwā al-Sirājiyya* by Sirājuddīn Ūshī (d. 1179–1180 CE), and specifically of the section dealing with inheritance (Wāli 1988: nos. 302, 362, 584, 791, 1006, 1100, 1237, 1474). Copies of Muḥammad b. ‘Abdurrashīd Sajāwandī’s (fl. c. 1023) work on inheritance are also common (nos. 27, 359, 584). The rest are comprised of the *Ḥidāya*; the *Durr al-muḥtār* and its commentary, the *Radd al-muḥtār*; Qudūrī’s *Mukhtaṣar*; and the *Majmū‘ al-khanī* of Karīm Khan Nagawrī of Dawlatābād, etc. (nos. 376, 634, 693, 695, 722, 728, 838, 1459, 1461, 1466, 1469). Some

later printed works mainly from Egypt, Tashkent, and India are also held in archives (Sulayman 2006: 463–465). The mixture of languages represented in print – Urdu, Arabic, Eastern Turkic, Ottoman, and Persian – points to the importance of the region’s persistent interconnections with the rest of the Muslim world through scholarship and law.

Nevertheless, the present author’s examination of a number of manuscripts from Xinjiang collections, including the Xinjiang Regional Library and Xinjiang University Library, revealed frequent miscataloguing.³ Reading a restricted catalog of manuscripts held at the Institute of Religion (*zongjiao suo*) of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences showed that thousands of other texts with similarly obscure descriptions still await examination. It is clear that the scholarly understanding of manuscript culture in the region remains very limited, and that significant basic textual work is necessary to comprehend the scope of legal writing in this period. However, none of these collections is open to scholars at the time of writing in 2021.

In some cases, miscataloguing has hidden manuscripts of legal texts produced locally in a process of “vernacularization,” in which mostly Arabic- and Persian-language works were compiled and translated into Chaghatay Turkic, often under the patronage of Turkic Muslim officials who were supposedly losing their skills in other languages (Sartori 2020: 23–27). In the late eighteenth century, Muḥammad Ṣādiq Kāshgharī, one of the region’s most prominent writers, composed the *Zubdat al-masā’il wa al-‘aqā’id*, a collection of *fatwas*. He explains in the introduction that he has translated into Turkic, as written in Kashgar, selections from a number of well-known Ḥanafī works, and that the translation was prompted by local people’s ignorance of Arabic and Persian and, consequently, the perceived inferiority of their Islamic practice. New research calls into question much of the received knowledge about Kāshgharī and his work, including its patronage, date, and reasons for the *Zubdat*’s composition. What is becoming clear is that the work drew on a variety of legal sources of Central Asian origin, the selection of which may indicate persistent connections with legal education as it was in madrasas in West Turkestan. Regardless of the *Zubdat*’s origins, manuscripts of it were made as late as 1873–1874 and, judging by marginal notes, read as late as 1881. The work further circulated in lithograph, including a printing by the Ottoman Ministry of Education in 1897, indicating its remarkable success and longevity.

Interactions between Islamic law and the imperial political and juridical system in the High Qing were complex and varied, and scholarship has struggled to capture them in a single model. Probing the margins of Islamic law leaves the further impression that innovation took place locally in ways that remain unrecorded in Chinese-language sources. Future scholarship will ideally illuminate the evolution of local legal institutions, including courts, while connecting textual sources to developments in Central and South Asia.

The “Muslim uprisings” and interregnum (1864–1878)

Violations of Islamic law on the part of officials, especially the imposition of excessive taxes beyond those specified by shariah, were among the factors that led to the so-called “Muslim uprisings.” During this period, several local Muslim groups cast off Qing rule and competed for regional dominance (Kim 2004: 102–108, 129–131, 136–137). Restoration of shariah was a rallying cry for each faction. The khwājas of Kucha, for example, in their early campaigns made public displays of restoring an Islamic sociomoral order by executing “deviants” and apostates, while restoring *qāḍīs* and *mufṭīs* to positions of political power.

Eventually, the Khoqandi officer Ya‘qūb Beg (1820–1877) established an emirate based in Kashgar that eliminated its factional opposition. Visitors to the emirate often remarked on

the rigor of inspection and severity of punishment by the *muhtasibs* who patrolled the streets, evidently imposing a more stringent interpretation of shariah than had existed before. Mūsā Sayrāmī, who chronicled this period and worked as a tax collector during it, characterizes the emirate instead as an internally contradicted regime in which Islamic law was enforced unevenly, and while petty officials like himself remained dedicated to shariah, the leaders and their exactions overburdened the people, leading to tyranny and the emirate's downfall.

In 1871, however, another “vernacularized” legal text was composed in Kashgar, the *Majmūʿat al-masāʾil*. Much like Kāshgharī's work, this is a compilation of *fatwas* produced for an official patron, Muʿīn Beg (Anon. 1871: f. 9r; Anon. 1329/1911: 9).⁴ In both known copies, extensive usage is demonstrated in marginalia dating from 1911 through 1935 and signed with the names of scholars, as well as a note specifying that this work was used at the Kashgar Islamic court. Its other sources are mostly those cited in the *Zubdat*, as well as the *Qunyat al-munya* of the Khwārezmian jurist Mukhtār b. Maḥmūd al-Zāhidī (d. 1260). At the time the work was composed, Yaʿqūb Beg was in the midst of a difficult campaign against his remaining competitors to the north and east, as well as increasing attempts to demonstrate legitimacy, including securing recognition by the Ottoman Caliph. Given those circumstances, the *Majmūʿat* may be an artifact of state-building that outlasted Islamic rule itself, and if so, it represents a significant legacy of a lost era of independence.

Late Qing and early Republican Xinjiang (1877–1934)

In 1877, the Qing reconquered the region. However, the party that took control of it began to convert this indirectly ruled Inner Asian territory into a province on the model of those in China proper, complete with the imperial Chinese politico-juridical system. In this system, a magistrate appointed centrally on a rotating basis acted as the chief bureaucrat and judge for each local administrative unit. This new provincial government focused its efforts on displacing Islamic law, which the new rulers regarded as a flawed version of Confucian orthodoxy, and its practitioners as fraudulent scholars (Schluessel 2020). However, that process was never successful – instead, Muslim jurists were integrated into the state in new ways, while Islamic legal institutions found new life in the revivification of council-style shariah courts (*maḥkama-ye sharʿī*).

While the first wave of Chinese scholarship studied the High Qing mainly through metropolitan documents, the opening of the Xinjiang provincial archives and local archives of Turfan in the late 2000s permitted a new wave of local historical research on this period and its richer base of sources. Article-length works initially probed the question of how Islamic and provincial law interacted. Liang Haixia (2011) was the first to use these sources to tell a general history of law in southern Xinjiang from the late Qing through the Republic. Soon followed further articles by such scholars as Ma Xiaojuan (2012) who used local-history methods developed in the China field to study the complexities of establishing the politico-juridical system in a culturally non-Chinese area (Bai 2019: 127–128).

In 2012, the Turfan archive from the late Qing was then published in facsimile, while part of its Republican-era archive was placed online (Guojia dangʻan ju; Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu zhongxin 2012). The Turfan archive poses several problems of interpretation, particularly with regard to Islamic law. The rules governing late-Qing Xinjiang required local authorities to exclude Islamic legal specialists from the judicial process, or else face punishment. While that rule was impossible to implement fully in practice, the effect was nevertheless to obscure the role of Islamic law in the archive, even as Islamic legal specialists evidently worked closely with

local Chinese authorities, often even in the *yamen*, where *qāḍīs* served as intermediaries and scribes (Schluessel 2018). Therefore, the archives must be read carefully and critically in order to discern the operation of Islamic law despite its obscurity.

The end of the Qing in the winter of 1911–1912 witnessed a retreat of the state from society and revival of practices imitating the High Qing across most of the region, even as the provincial framework remained in place and modern legal organs were established in major administrative centers, with the result that law in its local contexts remains largely obscure (Liang 2011: 136–143, 163–168). Islamic law is generally described in official documents from this period in terms of “custom,” which the regional government used to justify returning most disputes to local Muslim authorities.

However, some scholars have studied Chaghatay texts, especially “economic” documents that were necessarily tied closely to Islamic law. Wang Shouli and Li Jinxin’s (1994) publication of a collection of Chaghatay-language contracts in Chinese translation provided a set of accessible, although sometimes inaccurately rendered, sources. Zhang Shicai’s (2015) more recent publication of similar sources in facsimile with Uyghur transliteration and Chinese translation allows more direct access to the texts. Both collections also present basic problems of framing: documents are decontextualized and presented as single items for philological study, and even when items in a collection are in fact interrelated, they are seldom adjacent. Moreover, the “economic” framing deemphasizes the critical significance of Islamic law and institutions, which is especially important as many of these documents pertain to pious endowments (Schluessel 2018).

One way forward has been shown by scholars working primarily with informal archives or collections of Islamic legal documents, which sometimes provide greater continuity across sources (Mirsultan 2020; Sugawara 2010; 2012; 2016a; 2016b). Several have engaged with the field of family law and produced groundbreaking studies on issues such as divorce and adoption (Kamalov 2018; Mirsultan 2020). A family archive that has circulated in digital form for many years among Uyghur scholars has illuminated much about inheritance in Kashgaria, as has a large collection of local documents now held at Xinjiang University. The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin also offers “Ms. or. fol. 3296,” a curious register of divorces recorded at the Kashgar Islamic court, which, thanks to its orderly presentation of data, naturally attracts scholarly attention, while the Lund University Library’s Jarring Collection and the Houghton Library at Harvard hold a number of Chaghatay-language legal texts. One fruitful approach has been to study the gradual mutual adaptation of Chinese and Islamic legal texts (Jin 2001). However, a division remains between scholarship that emphasizes Chinese archives and those that work from Arabic-script texts. As of the time of writing, the present author’s monograph is the only scholarly work to put the Chaghatay and Chinese sources in and around the Turfan archive into dialogue, and to combine the local-history approach with an ethnographic approach prominent in Euro-American scholarship (Schluessel 2020). The field has developed rapidly over the past decade, however, and seems poised to expand further in the near future as digital archives offer an unprecedented degree of accessibility.

The movement of European travelers, diplomats, and missionaries into Xinjiang in this period produced a wealth of ethnographic data, which has in turn inspired explorations of Islamic law that emphasize the distinctiveness of local practices, as exemplified by and synthesized in Ildikó Bellér-Hann’s (2008) historical anthropological work. While travel accounts are obviously problematic, they sometimes illuminate dimensions of Islamic law that are obscured in the Chinese archive and even in Muslim sources, especially where missionaries, for example, were resident over several decades. Consular and missionary reports, when

combined with Chinese documents and autoethnography by local informants, show how complex relationships developed between Chinese officials (locally weak but with access to provincial power) and Islamic authorities (locally influential but without strong enforcement powers or resources).

British and Russian consular power was also highly influential, as by the 1910s foreign consuls were also jurists possessing police powers over mobile transfrontierspeople who were often tightly integrated into local society, thereby extending colonial law into Xinjiang (Brophy 2016: 78–82; Whewell 2020). Accounts of dispute resolution involving multiple Muslim communities show how skilled Chinese, Muslim, and foreign officials could work together to secure substantive “justice” (*adālah*) for one party or another (Schluessel 2016: 340–344, 359–365; Schluessel 2019). However, those relationships varied considerably from place to place: a Chinese magistrate might be entirely at the mercy of Islamic authorities, or implement policies that disrupted institutions created through shariah, or even invoke shariah to enforce their own vision of the correct moral order. Meanwhile, travelers’ accounts and ethnographic research corroborate the existence of council-style Islamic courts in major population centers (Wang 2004: 40–41).

Euro-American scholarship, however, has tended to focus on the relationship between Chinese, Islamic, and “customary” law as demonstrated through dispute resolution (Bellér-Hann 2003; 2008: 179–216). This approach is hermeneutically useful and speaks to the variety of legal systems and ideologies that coexisted. However, the nature of the sources has made it difficult to historicize those relationships. For example, these accounts often emphasize a practice that was evidently peculiar to East Turkestan, “temporary marriage” (*waqtlıq toy*), an arrangement similar to the *mufa* marriage of Iran (Bellér-Hann 2008: 266–275; Schluessel 2020: 118–125). While foreign travelers and Chinese officials in the late Qing and Republican periods certainly noticed the practice, the Islamic sources obscure it, and it receives no special treatment in known legal texts. While I have made some attempt to identify changes in temporary marriage, the story of its emergence and its place in legal reasoning waits to be told. This remains the case for much of Islamic law in Xinjiang. The term “customary law” also possesses an uncomfortable consonance with the emergence of “customary law” (Ch. *xiguanfa*) as a category of the Chinese state during this same period, and one that was used to reinterpret Islamic law as a property of ethnicity (Erie 2016: 59–67). Consequently, these categories may deserve reconsideration in light of further empirical evidence.

Significant archival and textual research is necessary in order to illuminate the evidently very complex world of Islamic law in this “provincial” period, during which Islamic law and legal institutions were simultaneously powerful in their own time but minimized in the documentary record. The end of this era, however, came with the province’s attempt after 1928 at last to normalize the region and assert Chinese authority to the detriment of shariah and the Islamic social order (Sharqī Turkistān Istiqlāl Jam’iyati 1933: 28, 32–33; Shinmen 2001: 151). While the resulting uprisings of the early 1930s had complex causes, they resulted in the establishment of the short-lived East Turkestan Republic (1933–1934) through an alliance of Islamist and Turkist leaders. The constitution of the Republic presents Islamic law as the basis of the state. The Ministry of Justice, headed by a *shaykhu ‘l-islām*, was explicitly a “ministry of religious law” (*ḍīnīyya ‘adiliyya naẓārātī*), while the Ministry of Finance was to be run according to the principles of Islamic law, with taxes limited to *‘ushr* and *zakāt*. A Ministry of Pious Endowments was modeled explicitly on those of Turkey and Egypt, and it sought to bring *waqf* properties under its control. The Republic, however, was short-lived, and little is known about the implementation of its policies. A study of its political and legal system in international context appears to be in order.

Much like the High Qing, the provincial period hints at the vibrancy and continuity of Islamic law and legal institutions despite the more aggressive imposition of Chinese law. Reports from the province, and certainly from the central government, are minimally useful in this period, and even the local archive obscures a great deal about law in society. However, detailed studies of local history based on combinations of Muslim, Chinese, and foreign sources are gradually building up a picture of how law worked in the region.

Late Republican and revolutionary Xinjiang (1934–1955)

While the East Turkestan Republic was short-lived, its attempted institutionalization of Islamic law set a precedent for the incorporation of Islamic legal personnel into the state, albeit in a different way. The following two decades of rapid change witnessed a series of revolutionary regimes: the complex provincial government under Sheng Shicai (1934–1944), which implemented a program of nationalization; the second East Turkestan Republic (1944–1949), which was run on the Soviet model, simultaneous with a provincial Xinjiang controlled loosely by Chinese Nationalists in collaboration with local Turkic nationalists; and the People's Republic of China that absorbed the region in 1949.

In 1934, Soviet support led to the defeat of the Republic and installation of the warlord Sheng Shicai as the leader of Xinjiang province. The province was now run by an uneasy collection of Nationalists, Soviets, and remaining Turkists. Sheng's government oversaw a redistribution of resources, including seized *waqf* lands, to new systems of education and public welfare that institutionalized ethnonational identities. The Chinese judicial system, however, remained radically underdeveloped across most of the region until the late 1940s, and branches of the provincial high court were only established in major centers every few years (Liang 2011: 191–212). Local Muslim authorities continued to mediate disputes and handle the vast majority of legal matters, and the government would return nearly all “civil” cases to them.

Throughout this period, extensive documentary evidence from the Chaghatay-language archives described in the previous section indicates that Islamic law continued to operate more or less as it had all the way through the mid-1950s. A series of documents in the Zhang Shicai collection, for example, demonstrate the creation and maintenance of a single *waqf* near Khotan from the late Qing, through the early Republic and the dominance of the local state of “Dunganistan” (1934–1937), all the way into the Mao era (Zhang 2015). *Qādis* continued to investigate and mediate conflicts and stamp documents resolving them. Islamic legal institutions were resilient.

Islamic law even persisted in the Second East Turkestan Republic, a Soviet-backed state that Chinese history calls the “Three Districts Revolution” (*San qu geming*), referring to the three northern districts it encompassed: Ili, Tarbaghatai, and Altai. Yan Dianqing's 1991 work, published in Chinese and Uyghur, is the key and perhaps only scholarly analysis and documentary collection dealing with law in this state (Yan 1999: 5–8, 354–355).⁵ According to Yan, the Republic established parallel judicial organs on the model of the Soviet Union: the Ministry of Justice and supreme court were formed in early spring 1945, while the police were under the Ministry of the Interior, the Revolutionary Army had its own military courts, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs controlled shariah courts (*māhkimā shār'i*). Shariah courts were set up at every level of administration, forming a hierarchy in which the lowest-level courts' jurisdictions did not overlap. The courts were built on the council model, and their jurisdiction was also limited by law to investigating and trying matters related to religion, marriage, and orphans, as well as mediating nonviolent cases, mostly concerning contracts. The Republic's

Penal Code further defined shariah as “national custom,” making it equivalent to a customary basis for civil law.

Manuscript sources and Chinese reports show that, between the absorption of the region into the People’s Republic of China in 1949–1950 and the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, Islamic legal practitioners continued to operate, despite the formal abolition of *qāḍīs* in 1950 (Fuller and Lipman 2004; Xinhua tongxun she 1953; Zhang et al. 2015: 882–883). The documentary record for this period is thin, but directives aimed at eliminating Islamic courts indicate that antireligious campaigns were ultimately successful. During this period, researchers collected many Islamic texts, including the legal manuals described in archive catalogs, while social survey teams sent to the countryside identified the remaining pious endowments as feudal estates, and their lands were soon redistributed (Thum 2014: 232–233). The massive shift in the regional economy and society that must have accompanied the elimination of Islamic institutions has yet to be documented.

Afterlives of Islamic Law in the People’s Republic of China (1955–present)

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was declared in 1955 as an administrative unit nominally intended to protect the independent development of the Uyghur people. Some vestiges of Islamic law, now construed as “custom,” were codified in regional regulations specifying specific rights of minorities regarding dietary restrictions, marriage practices, etc. (Erie 2016: 70–75). However, it has been singularly difficult for Muslims to have Islamic law recognized or enforced in a formal legal setting. Rather, the Communist Party preserved vestiges of Islamic law, presented as wholly punitive and barbarically violent, in order to justify their own dominion. Overall, this process resembles what Matthew Erie describes as the gradual narrowing of the scope of Islamic law in China during the transition from empire to nation-state, and its consequent reinterpretation as a matter of “custom” (Erie 2016: 43–45, 59–67). That flattening of law into immutable tradition, resembling the reimagination of Islamic law in colonial settings such as British India, presents obstacles to scholars, who must constantly question the categories of Islamic law and practice as presented in Chinese sources.

The Communist Party took a gradual approach to Muslim scholars and personnel, integrating them slowly into the Chinese Islamic Association (Millward and Tursun 2004: 88). An Islamic Institute established in 1955 for the study of hadith, *fiqh*, and other Islamic sciences ceased admitting students in 1959, evidently a victim of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (Newby 1988: 938). Later the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) witnessed the destruction of all such “traditional” culture across China, and it can be assumed that *qāḍīs* and *mufṭīs* were persecuted along with other scholars, while legal texts were destroyed among other manuscripts. Indeed, the present author’s discussions with antiquarians indicate that most of the historical documents later sold on the Xinjiang antiquities market were family archives buried during this decade and unearthed later on.

After the Cultural Revolution, a relaxation of secularizing policies in ethnic minority regions was accompanied by a revival of Islam, now more thoroughly under the control of the state through the China Islamic Association and the Xinjiang Islamic College, which opened in 1987 (Erie 2016: 75–84; Newby 1988: 941). A state-Islamic education based on pro-Party exegesis of the Qur’an is part of an attempt to use imams, called “religious personnel,” to propagandize and ensure stability on the lowest levels of Xinjiang society. This official attempt to capture Islam for social control has been accompanied by increasing international connections between Chinese Muslims and those abroad through trade and study, leading to a rise in Islamic legal consciousness.

In 2001, however, with the Party-state's turn towards an internal "War on Terror," these institutions emphasized instead "patriotic education" for Muslims meant to instill loyalty, and this has since become their primary function. In recent years, propaganda campaigns have explicitly contrasted a public, brightly colored, liberating image of the Chinese Constitution with a picture of Islamic law as secretive, dark, and oppressive (Byler 2017). This final development again frustrates research, as Chinese authorities have adopted not only American "War of Terror" discourse, but also a rhetoric of Islamic law similar to the Western xenophobe's depiction of "shariah law" as a creeping threat. Consequently, in China, publication on the history of Islamic law has been curtailed, while the topic has moved into counterterrorism and security discourse.

Conclusion

Misidentification and imperial knowledge-making have plagued the study of Islamic law in Xinjiang for over a century. So have significant problems of source collection and criticism that have only recently begun to find resolution. Study of the period from Islamization through the mid-eighteenth century remains firmly in the realm of philology, while the High Qing has stimulated important new questions about the relationship between Islamic law and the Qing empire, and the archival richness of the late Qing and early Republic have helped to answer them from a local perspective. The suppression of shariah and Muslim legal practitioners in the People's Republic, however, has frequently made scholarship taboo, while driving Islamic legal consciousness behind closed doors.

The adaptation of Islamic legal institutions to changing circumstances have contributed both to its obscurity in the archive and to its persistence. The Qing and the twentieth century especially appear to be a fertile ground for further investigation; while shariah and its most prominent institutions, such as pious endowments, are largely absent from the Chinese-language sources in this period, it is my suspicion that a better understanding of social realities and their representation will in time reveal that Islamic jurists were, in fact, broadly participating in the administrations in both periods. Much as scholars have only recently begun to realize the extent of Islamic vernacular cultural production in the Soviet Union, it remains to be seen what of Islamic law has survived and changed in Xinjiang since 1949.

Finding continuities between Xinjiang and neighboring regions and across time is, despite all these obstacles, proving to be a valuable approach that demonstrates not only the local specificity of Islamic law and legal institutions in the region, but their persistent transnational connections and great resilience. Current scholarship also seeks to uncover how Islamic law worked in the local context, thereby lending depth and texture to our understanding of everyday life. While significant scholarship still needs to be done to lay a foundation for a history of Islamic law in Xinjiang in all its vicissitudes, current sources and methodologies are promising.

Notes

- 1 The author is deeply grateful to David Brophy and Paolo Sartori for sharing references and insights, including unpublished research, that have greatly enriched this chapter.
- 2 Bai Jinglan's recent article is a detailed and useful summary of scholarship on law in Qing Xinjiang since the 1980s.
- 3 The Xinjiang Regional Library's catalog has the additional difficulty of listing Islamic texts only by their titles in Chinese, which can be transliterations, translations, or simply descriptions of the contents.
- 4 Leiden Or. 26.684 adds a *shadda*: "Mu'ayyin Beg."
- 5 I cite here the Uyghur translation, which is more commonly found.

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MAJOR TURNING POINTS FOR SHI‘I ISLAM IN MODERN SOUTH ASIA

Princely states, partition, and a revolution

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs

Scholarship on Shi‘ism in Asia resembles a giant, colorful, yet woefully incomplete jigsaw puzzle. While some limited boundary areas and topical islands in between look quite promising, there are still many large stretches where we have as of yet only managed to tentatively place some speculative pieces. In the case of Southeast Asia, for example, debates over the origins of Shi‘i Islam in the region and implications of “Shi‘i-like” forms of veneration continue (Formichi and Feener 2015: 3–16; Zulkifli 2013). There and in Central Asia, many works on Shi‘i communities foreground questions of sectarianism and religious conflict (Balci 2004; Monsutti 2010). This narrow focus stands in marked contrast to rich studies on Shi‘i piety, material culture, and politics, to name just a few aspects, in places such as twentieth-century Lebanon, Iraq, or Iran (Clarke and Künkler 2018). The historical genesis and intellectual history of these Middle Eastern Shi‘i communities is well-documented (Anzali 2017; Babayan 2002; Winter 2010).

As far as South Asia is concerned, we are fortunate to have studies on how male and female Shi‘i believers in contemporary India and Pakistan engage with the founding narrative of Karbala in terms of ritual (Hegland 1998; Pinault 2003; Schubel 1993). The more recent history of Shi‘i religious change, political organizing, and thought in colonial India and Pakistan has received attention by some pioneering studies (Jones 2011; Rieck 2015). Reaching back in time, we also have a fairly good sense of the internal dynamics of several Shi‘i ruled states in Southern India and how Shi‘ism was debated in elite circles at the Mughal court (Rizvi 2017). And yet, the phenomenon of conversion to Shi‘i Islam in the subcontinent remains understudied. For instance, we can only marshal anecdotal evidence regarding periods of widespread missionary work. There are several Shi‘i dynasties (such as the Talpurs in Sindh or the Nawabs of Rampur) that have received no more than scant attention (Schimmel 1964). Various important centers of Shi‘i activity and learning – such as the Punjab, Sindh, the frontier region with Afghanistan, Kashmir, Gilgit, and Baltistan but also colonial Bombay, modern South India, and perhaps even Bangladesh – require more fine-grained studies (Gupta 2014; Rieck 2002) to even begin to overcome the dominating scholarly focus on Lucknow, and the province of Uttar Pradesh (formerly known as the United Provinces) in general.

For the modern period, we face multiple lacunae when it comes to conceptualizing Sunni–Shi'i relations. In the context of Pakistan, in which narratives of a “Shi'i genocide” and lachrymose conceptions of Shi'is as a persecuted minority dominate (Fuchs and Fuchs 2020), scholarship has often been bedeviled by the tendency to exclusively blame outside actors for the emergence of this toxic sectarian landscape (Ahmed 2011). Relatedly, there is a certain perplexity in academic writings that attempt to explore why the supposed pre-colonial sectarian harmony suddenly got shattered (Hasan 1996; Ilahi 2007). Given this general interest in sectarian dynamics, it is somewhat surprising that we still do not have a critical study of the foundational text of anti-Shi'i polemics, namely Shah 'Abd al-Aziz's (d. 1824) *Tuhfah-i Ithna 'Ashariyya* (Gift to the Twelver Shi'is), completed in 1789/1790.

Finally, the care which scholars of South Asian Islam have devoted to uncover shared forms of piety that go beyond simplistic understandings of “syncretism” (Mir 2012) has not been equally applied to areas of shared intra-Muslim forms of devotion, such as Sufism. Even today, there remain significant spaces in South Asia where Sunnis and Shi'is congregate. In these contexts, Shi'i symbols continue to be visible and, in fact, play an important part in this intermingling (Boivin 2011; Robinson 2014). It should also be stressed that Shi'ism is by no means represented in South Asia in its Twelver manifestation only. In the nineteenth century, the internal Isma'ili structure and religious hierarchy was renegotiated in the public eye in front of British courts (Boivin 2013; Purohit 2012). Communities of Isma'ilis and Bohras thrive until today (Asani 2001; Blank 2001; Akkerman 2021). Both Twelver and Isma'ili communities from the subcontinent can be credited with having made their mark far beyond South Asia with the case of East Africa being a particularly intriguing example (Jaffer 2013; Akhtar 2016, Mukherjee 2017).

This chapter is an attempt at charting a path forward to fill these gaps. I therefore start with a reassessment of Lucknow as the supposed capital of Shi'i authority in South Asian history by shedding light on alternative “centers,” such as the Deccan or the Punjab. I then turn to the core of my contribution, namely the delineation of a trajectory of Shi'i religious authority in India since the nineteenth century in relation to the Shi'i “heartlands” of knowledge and political developments in the greater Middle Eastern region and South Asia itself. The gravity of both centers and sources of authority underwent several major shifts in the modern period.

To demonstrate these dynamics, I focus on three turning points in order to provide a (limited) sense of the state of the field. My point of departure shall be the deposition of Wajid 'Ali Shah (r. 1847–1856), the final King of Awadh, in 1856. This political act was not only one of the sparks leading to the uprising against British rule in the subcontinent revolt of 1857 (also known as the “Mutiny”), but also brought an end to the Shi'i state of Awadh, a wealthy and powerful patron of Shi'i institutions, scholarship, and art. As a consequence, Shi'i communal life began to coalesce around voluntary associations and other models of leadership throughout Northern India. The next major turning point to be considered here is the Partition of the Subcontinent in 1947. While leading scholars stayed behind in what became India, many popular (and often “esoterically-minded”) preachers migrated to Pakistan, trying to carve out new Shi'i spaces in the state that was envisioned as a homeland for India's Muslims. These voices were eventually challenged after a new generation of reformist-minded religious scholars (*ulama*) returned from their studies in Najaf, Iraq to Pakistan. A final turning point is the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which caused significant internal cleavages in both India and Pakistan. Politicized scholars who embraced Iran's revolutionary ideology became pitted against those who rejected such readings of the faith. More importantly, however, the rise to power by the Shi'i clergy in Iran opened a new and painful chapter of Shi'i–Sunni sectarianism in South Asia.

Political power, Shi'ism, and princely states

Despite the impression one gets from its predominance in scholarship, Awadh with its splendid Shi'i mosques and mourning halls was by no means the only or even the most ancient Shi'i princely state in India. In fact, Lucknow was only chosen as capital of the dynasty in 1775. By this time, Shi'i Islam had established important footholds in the subcontinent for centuries with early Zaydi and Isma'ili missionaries playing an influential role. By 985, the Friday sermon in Multan was read in the name of the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt and coins were minted in their name (S. Athar Abbas Rizvi 1986, vol. 1: 143–144). After being defeated by Mahmud of Ghazni (d. 1030), the Isma'ili kingdom of Multan managed to briefly to reestablish itself. Thereafter, Isma'ili religious thought went “underground” and continued to survive in the context of certain Sufi orders (S. Athar Abbas Rizvi 1986, vol. 1: 145–146). Shi'i impact in the Deccan in Southern India proved to be longer lasting. It seems as if direct descendants of the Prophet (*sayyids*) played an important role early on in propagating Shi'i Islam in the region (S. Athar Abbas Rizvi 1986, vol. 1: 248), even though it should be pointed out that the dedicated study of *sayyids* in South Asia is still in its infancy (Gautier and Levesque 2020).

Shi'ism and political power in the Deccan and North India

The Sunni Bahmani kingdoms (1347–1526) of the Deccan were eager to attract Persian soldiers, traders, and administrators at a time when the area comprising present-day Iran was not yet majority Shi'i. All of the Bahmani successor states continued to maintain close links with Iran, where from 1501 the Safavids had set out to convert the country (Abisaab 2004). The founder of the 'Adil Shah kingdom of Bijapur, Yusuf 'Adil Khan (r. 1490–1510), turned his domain into a Shi'i state in 1502. The height of Persian and thus Shi'i influence was visible under 'Ali 'Adil Shah (1558–1580). During his reign, the Friday sermon (*khutba*) was read in the name of the 12 Imams and he commissioned buildings designated for Shi'i mourning ceremonies (*ashurakhanas*). The Shi'i experiment was ended in 1580, with Persians losing influence at court. A roughly similar development can be discerned with regard to the Nizam Shahs of Ahmadnagar, where Iranian immigrants played an important role until the late sixteenth century. Most remarkable, however, is the case of the Kingdom of Golconda. Ibrahim Qutb Shah (r. 1550–1580) wrote submissive letters to the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576). His son Muhammad Quli also extended extensive patronage to Iranians, who dominated the court and such areas as ship-owning or trade until the mid-seventeenth century (Subrahmanyam 1992: 344–347).

But perhaps the focus in much of the literature on Iran and the “import” of Shi'i scholars and bureaucrats has clouded our vision for local forms of Shi'i Islam: as Karen Ruffle has shown, the Qutb Shahs also developed novel forms of devotion not tied to Iranian paradigms. Their “reliquary Shi'ism” was directed towards the “acquisition, display, and use of relics” associated with the Shi'i Imams and the members of the household of the Prophet Muhammad (*ahl al-bayt*) (Ruffle 2017: 332; see her contribution to in this volume on the footprints of the Prophet and Alids). Ruffle singles out the “*bibi ka 'alam*,” a standard or metal crest which supposedly contains a fragment of the funerary plank on which the Prophet's daughter Fatima al-Zahra was washed after her demise (Ruffle 2017: 336). This relict is still displayed in Hyderabad today during Muharram atop an elephant, constituting the “zenith” of rituals related to 'Ashura which are attended by both Hindus and Muslims (Ruffle 2017: 342). Ruffle also suggests that the construction of Hyderabad's most famous landmark, the Charminar, which attempted, through a “fusion of Indic and Perso-Islamic design and motifs,” to bring together “two models of

kingship, one *dharmic* and the other Shi'i" (Ruffle 2020: 300–301). The Qutb Shahs were thus “fully acculturated to their new homeland in the Deccan” in the sense that they not only spoke local languages, but also managed to invoke both Islamic and “subcontinental themes” which were shared by Hindus and Muslims (Ruffle 2020: 289–290).

The dissolution of the Deccani states was not the end of premodern Shi'ism in India, obviously. Shi'ism had been preached by Nurbakhshi Sufis in Kashmir, which was also ruled from 1528 until 1686 by the Shi'i tribe of the Chaks (Hollister 1953: 145–149). Shi'i Sayyid families were well represented in many of rural townships of North India known as *qasbas* (Jones 2011: 10–12; Rahman 2015). Shi'i courtiers and *'ulama* also exerted influence at the Mughal court. A case in point is Nurullah Shustari, who left the Safavid realm in 1576 due to the turmoil gripping the empire after the death of Shah Tahmasp and established a close relationship with the Mughal ruler Akbar (r. 1556–1605). Shustari was executed in 1610 under emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), which is why he is known as the “third martyr” among Shi'is (*shahid-i salis*) in South Asia. The circumstances of this incident remain murky. There does not appear to exist conclusive proof to either ascribe his death to anti-Shi'i animosities on behalf of Jahangir, nor to a political fallout or accusations that Shustari was too openly propagating his Shi'i faith (Rizvi 2017: 65). Shi'i influence continued unabated at the Mughal court: during the early reign of emperor Aurangzeb, out of 486 high-office holders, 136, or 28%, were Iranians who “often hid their beliefs at the Sunni Mughal court” (Cole 1988: 81). From 1701 until 1757, semi-independent Shi'i governors ruled Bengal for the Mughals, which led to the construction of Shi'i *imambarghas* in towns such as Murshidabad and Hoogly (Mirza 2000: 21–122).

Early modern sectarian conflict

The perceived continued danger of Shi'ism as being attractive to Sunnis in South Asia was also highlighted by Shah 'Abd al-Aziz, a son of the eminent scholar Shah Wali Allah Dihlavi (d. 1762). He justified writing the *Tuhfa*, in which he set out to demonstrate that the Shi'is neither believed in divine unicity (*tauhid*) nor considered the Prophet Muhammad as the final Prophet, in the following way:

In the region (*bilād*) where we live the Ithnā' 'Ashariyya faith has become so popular that there can be no house where one or two men have not adopted this vicious faith or are not inclined to the Shī'ī beliefs. The majority of these are wanting in a knowledge of history and *ahādīth* and are unaware and ignorant of the principles of their ancestral (Sunnī) faith. Whenever the Shī'īs discuss their faith in Sunnī assemblies, they distort the fact and talk nonsense. I have written this book only to please God and to prevent the Sunnīs from straying from their faith in polemics with the Shī'īs and to make them steadfast to their basic principles.

S. Athar Abbas Rizvi 1982: 256

This work set in motion an endless cycle of polemics since it

gave the Shī'īs who based their faith on *tabarra* (dissociation from the first three successors of the Prophet Muhammad) a heaven-sent opportunity to retaliate in even harsher language on the excuse that “those who throw brickbats must expect to be hit with stones.”

S. Athar Abbas Rizvi 1982: 575

Some of these long-simmering conflicts burst on to the public stage in Awadh. The city emerged as a center of Shi'i learning and scholarship, not at least through the efforts of Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi (d. 1820), who returned to the city in 1781 after a transformative stay in Iraq. Nasirabadi's 18 months in Karbala and Najaf fundamentally reshaped his previous "scripturalist" Akhbari outlook that had highlighted the transmitted reports of the Imams. Instead, he adopted a "rationalist" Usuli stance and challenged the traditional religious elite of Awadh upon his return (Cole 1988: 62–65, 159–165).¹ This new mission was highly successful. The Nawab of Awadh, Asaf al-Dawla (r. 1775–1797), conveyed the title "leading jurist of the age" (*mujtahid al-'asr*) to Sayyid Dildar 'Ali. At the end of his life, Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's family had risen to such influence that his son Sayyid Muhammad Nasirabad (1785–1867) was chosen as the one who crowned Ghazi ul-Din Hayder in 1819 as the first King of Awadh (Cole 1988: 174–175). Sayyid Dildar 'Ali was careful to develop international recognition as well by sending his treatise *Asas al-Usul* (The Foundations of Jurisprudence), written in Arabic, to leading Shi'i scholars in Iraq: "His fundamental goal was to delegitimise the Akhbaris' strict adherence solely to the text and to justify the use of reason in the derivation of the law – hence to legitimise the process of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning)." Secondly, Nasirabadi also strove to challenge Sunni rivals and Sunni theology by forging a "distinctive Shi'i identity in the service of the state" (Rizvi 2014: 368–369). After Sayyid Dildar 'Ali's death, his five sons significantly enhanced the close relation with Awadh's Shi'i ruling elite until 1856 when the British East India Company disbanded Awadh: "The household's key representatives, over these two critical generations, collaborated in a project of Shi'i statecraft." This meant supporting the government through legal rulings, working in the administration, advising the judiciary, and granting religious legitimacy to the dynasty (Jones 2020: 1153).

Awadh's influence beyond India

Awadh's rise as a wealthy Shi'i polity had consequences far beyond the subcontinent. During the eighteenth century, Najaf in Ottoman Iraq was far from the bustling global center of Shi'i learning and pilgrimage that it is today. This is not to downplay the city's historical importance due to the shrine of 'Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), the fourth caliph and first Shi'i Imam. Yet, Najaf faced two constant and existential threats, namely raids by Arab tribes and the lack of any reliable water supply. The Portuguese traveler Pedro Teixeira, for example, described the city as ruined and "declined in every way" in 1604. Despite all efforts, such as by the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629) in 1623, aqueducts kept silting up. Things only changed in 1780 when Awadh's Chief Minister Hasan Reza Khan donated 500,000 Rupees. With this Indian money, Najaf's new Hindiyya (meaning "Indian") canal became operational after 1803, leading to a complete reversal of fortune for the shrine city. Massive numbers of pilgrims could now be sustained. Even more important, Arab tribes were attracted to the area and converted to Shi'i Islam. This development made Iraq a majority Shi'i region until today. A separate "Oudh Bequest" from Awadh paid stipends to 1,200 Iranian and Arab students in Najaf in the 1850s. The fund enhanced the religious standing, opportunities for patronage, and transnational reach enjoyed by the city's leading Shi'i clerical families in unprecedented ways (Cole 1986; Nakash 1994: 29–48; Litvak 2001).

The uprising against the British in 1857 did not directly result in a decline of Lucknow's fortunes, but it led to a significant reworking of Indian Shi'ism. Lucknow's leading scholarly household, the descendants of Sayyid Dildar 'Ali Nasirabadi, known as the "family of independent legal reasoning" (*khandan-i ijtihad*), successfully navigated the transition towards social and spiritual guidance of the community, displaying even a willingness to work with the British



Figure 10.1 The Bara Imambara complex in Lucknow, built during the reign of Nawab Asaf al-Dawla (r. 1775–1797), was meant to underline the power of the Shī'i dominated state of Awadh. The Asfi mosque is visible on the left. Picture Credit: Simon Wolfgang Fuchs.

authorities, which also entailed that they could regain roles as prayer leaders in Lucknow's famous Asfi mosque (Jones 2020: pp. 1172–1181). The Husainabad Trust, set up in 1839, was not confiscated by the British authorities, and enabled Shī'is in Lucknow to “retain Muharram in all its grandeur.” In fact, this special position of Lucknow continued in independent India as well. A 1961 report prepared by anthropologists for the Indian government emphasized “the central role the Trust occupied in the Azadari processions that were regularly attended between 2,000 to 4,000 people” (Pandit 2018: 1696, 1722).

Shī'is, the public sphere, and colonial Indian modernity

In other areas of Shī'i life, however, the drying up of princely patronage was acutely felt throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the dwindling support for monumental Shī'i building projects and religious institutions, Shī'i scholars and popular preachers started to rival for public funds and influence. Like other (religious) groups, they established multiple voluntary associations (*anjumans*) and took advantage of the emerging public sphere (Scott and Ingram 2015). Private donations, for example, led to a veritable building boom of Shī'i mourning halls, as well as the construction of an impressive tomb complex for Shustari in Agra.

The Shī'is of colonial India thus “adapted entirely to the national currents of community-based activism and pressure-group petitioning that characterized public life in the era of elite

nationalism” (Jones 2011: 118). This reorientation had several implications. For one, a hardening of sectarian boundaries in Lucknow and beyond, even though there were always attempts at fostering reconciliation (Khan 2015). Already in 1906, the Sunni and Shi‘i Muharram processions had parted ways after the Shi‘is had complained to the British authorities that their solemn commemoration of Husayn’s death had been turned into a “carnival” by Sunni participants. When the Sunnis, cheered on by a new generation of vernacular preachers, reacted by starting to publicly praise the first four, “rightly-guided” Caliphs, the British authorities enacted a ban on praising the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*madh-i sahaba*). The resolve to uphold this restriction got increasingly tested again in the late 1930s. The ensuing *tabarra* agitation turned into sectarian clashes that involved thousands of Shi‘i volunteers from North India, cutting in its appeal across boundaries of neighborhood, family, class, and political persuasion (Jones 2011: 186–211).

Shi‘is positioned themselves as embracing the pure, unadulterated meaning of Islam that was “spiritually” superior to the Sunnis. This competition, waged in pamphlets and periodicals, also had more sinister implications, as we have already seen in the context of the *tabarra* agitation. The damage done in this context also overshadowed the supposedly ecumenical project of Pakistan and Shi‘i “enthusiasm” for it (Dhulipala 2015: 445). A significant number of Shi‘i observers throughout the 1940s feared a trap. They raised the alarm about “fascist” inclinations on behalf of Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s Muslim League, the potential exclusive applicability of Sunni Hanafi law, and feared that Pakistan might turn out to be nothing more than a “Sunnistan” (Jones 2017). Yet, the late colonial period also witnessed increasing internal Shi‘i conflict. As I have argued elsewhere, the high-ranking Shi‘i religious scholars of Lucknow came under increasing scrutiny from modernist Shi‘is all over North India. Organized in the context of the All India Shi‘a Conference (AISC), they labeled the ‘*ulama* as being hopelessly out of touch with the requirements of the time. Instead, those Shi‘is attached to the AISC tried to position their organization as the central decision-making body for the community (Fuchs 2019: 24–34). Throughout this time and despite all the internal, India-wide concerns, South Asian Shi‘is remained deeply invested in global Shi‘i concerns, such as the attacks on Najaf’s cemetery by Wahhabi forces (Fuchs 2019: 38–50). As we will see in the next section, these ties with the Middle East were strengthened in the second half of the century, at least for Shi‘is in Pakistan. It should also be stressed, however, that the communal violence surrounding Partition rendered some of the fears about the potential oppressive nature of the new Muslim state, elaborated above, a mute question for Shi‘i Muslims in the Punjab, the United Provinces, and elsewhere. They, like other Muslims, often simply tried to get to safety (Talbot 2013). In this context, migrating to Pakistan also meant cutting ties with Shi‘i organizations and symbols that were left behind. In particular, the new borders on the subcontinent dealt a significant blow to Lucknow as an erstwhile center of the faith in South Asia.

The impact of partition on Shi‘ism in India and Pakistan

To be sure, the former residence of the Nawabs of Awadh was not deserted by all Twelver Shi‘is. Leading Shi‘i scholars deliberately decided to stay behind. A crucial example is the influential member of the *khandan-i ijtilah*, Sayyid ‘Ali Naqi Naqvi (d. 1988), known as Naqqan Sahib. He remained in India and exerted a commanding presence as a senior, Lucknow-based scholar who was capable of independent legal reasoning (*mujtahid*). Turning his back on the pan-Shi‘i world of seminary scholarship in Arabic and Persia, in the last 50 years of his life he shifted his focus to addressing the pressing intellectual and social issues of his Indian followers.

He tackled these concerns in accessible Urdu writings and quite frequently from the pulpit during Shi'i mourning sessions (*majalis*). Sayyid 'Ali Naqi Naqvi strove to emphasize the continuous relevance of religion in the face of what he perceived as Westernizing and secularizing trends among Indian Muslims. He therefore encouraged his coreligionists to follow a model of "detached cooperation" with the political order "for the sake of general peace in society" (Zamir 2011; Jones 2014). Such an authoritative reformist voice from among the *'ulama* did not exist in the new homeland for Muslims.

West Pakistan was only home to two minor Shi'i seminaries and it were predominantly junior scholars who settled in Pakistan. This "vacuum" provided a unique opportunity for other trends. As Andreas Rieck has shown, lay Shi'is were quick to start organizing, founding the All Pakistan Shi'a Conference, an "instrument of political clientelism throughout the coming decades," as well as the Organization for Safeguarding Shi'a Rights in Pakistan (Idarat-i Tahaffuz-i Huquq-i Shi'ah-i Pakistan, ITHS). The latter became quickly dominated "by large landowners, wealthy traders, members of the Civil Service and professional agitators" (Rieck 2001; Rieck 2015: 61). Shi'i religious scholars played only "second fiddle" in the ITHS but they achieved a meaningful victory at a *'ulama* conference held in Karachi in 1951, which agreed on 22 conditions for an Islamic state. Critical for the Shi'is was the inclusion of a clause that guaranteed "complete religious freedom" to all "recognised Muslim schools of thought" whose "personal status shall be administered in accordance with their respective codes of jurisprudence." This formula deliberately did not include the Ahmadis, underlining the (ultimately ill-founded) Shi'i hopes of forging a common front with the Sunnis for the "protection of the finality of the prophethood" (Qasmi 2014; Rieck 2015: 69–70).

More important for the present chapter, however, is the fact that also esoteric preachers (*zakirs*) and traditionalist junior scholars associated with the rather fringe Shaykhi school within Shi'i Islam moved to deftly increase their influence in post-Partition Pakistan.² What emerged was an ensuing, often harshly-worded competition between a local, Punjab-based reformist trend, and the new immigrants who were predominantly born in towns that were part of today's Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Hot-button topics concerned Shi'i rituals in general and the practices connected with *majalis* in particular. Early reformist figures claimed, for example, that popular preachers were "in their outward appearance, actions, and character far removed from religion." Catering to the tastes of their clients, they would consider the propagation of "true Islam" (*kalimah-i haqq*) as the "death knell to their business." The preachers, according to this charge, had consequently managed to turn away the common people from any serious and mainstream Shi'i teachings. It was a waste of time to reason with them since they openly took pride in immoral behavior and regarded the pulpit as giving them access to "the arena of a luxurious life style."

From there it was only a small step until more fundamental concerns of Shi'i theology took center stage because widely diverging views on what should be considered "orthodox" Shi'ism underpinned this battle over rituals (Fuchs 2019: 63). The intensification of these debates overlapped with the return of young Shi'i scholars in the 1960s from Najaf. Pakistani *'ulama* in general had been eager to catch up and take advantage of the intrinsically international Shi'i experience of learning, flocking in large numbers to Iraq's prominent scholars. An influential – or controversial, if you will – role on the reformist side was played by Muhammad Husayn Najafi Dhakko (b. 1933), who in 1960 headed back to Pakistan after six years of education in Najaf, becoming the principal of a leading religious Shi'i seminary in Sargodha. According to Dhakko, most of the Shi'i preachers in Pakistan were clearly Shaykhis who painted the *ahl al-bayt* in unduly superhuman colors (Naqvi 2001: 141). Dhakko, instead, argued that they did not differ intrinsically from other human beings. They were not made out of light and did not

exist with God before creation. In coordinating their attacks on Dhakko and other reformers, traditionalists and esoteric preachers had to consider that conceptualizing Shi'ism had become an intellectual activity that could no longer be debated in a restricted South Asian frame.

The centers of gravitas and authority had clearly shifted to the Middle East. While 'Ali Naqi Naqvi's legal opinions at times were included in their reasoning, the legacy of Lucknow was no longer key. Iranians and Iraqis were now called on as key witnesses to establish opinions opposed to reform. The traditionalists could refer, for example, to 18 contemporary "sources of emulation" who all had condoned the idea the Imams coming into existence before the rest of creation but also credited them with a truly cosmological role, namely their guardianship over creation (*vilayat-i takvini*). To put it differently: traditionalist scholars, too, had to refer to prominent grand ayatollahs in the Middle East and to (outwardly) acknowledge their authority. This phenomenon provides a cautionary tale because it demonstrates the difficulty of clearly distinguishing between supposedly "popular" and "high," "literate" forms of Shi'i Islam, especially also since the monographs produced by traditionalist scholars, brimming with complicated theological debates, were hardly written with only a lay audience in mind. In cases when these scholars referred to the life-worlds of their audiences, it was a distinctive middle-class idiom they used. Some of those voices who were most critical of the reformist religious scholars likened the appropriate conduct of the Shi'i believers during the time of the Occultation, to the behavior of a public servant who was actively awaiting and preparing for his "auditing team." The appearance of the Mahdi was "judgment day and audit day" and it was of utmost importance that one's "personal records" (*d'mal ke kaghazat*) should be in order on that occasion.

This conflict between reformists and traditionalists played out against the background of a changing sectarian context in Pakistan. While reformist scholars were afraid that certain Shi'i practices and beliefs would make their community look "unreasonable" and prone to "superstition" in front of the Sunnis, some of the esoteric voices were trying to find common ground with Sunnis by building on Sufi veneration of the Shi'i Imams (Fuchs 2019: 53–94). This ties in with further research that has demonstrated how Shi'is have tried to carve out an accepted space for themselves in their new homeland of Pakistan. They continue to re-read the early history of Pakistan, attempt to prove their unwavering loyalty to the state, try to build bridges with the majority community and, finally, portray themselves as being a spiritual elite that still guarantees the initial promise of Pakistan (Fuchs 2020).

As Noor Zaidi has shown, Shi'is have also made efforts to underline that Pakistan constituted a Shi'i spiritual landscape long before the founding of the state. Consider the case of Bibi Pak Daman, a formerly rather unimportant shrine attributed to a daughter of Husayn, Sayyida Ruqayya, who supposedly came to Lahore in the aftermath of the battle of Karbala. In a Shi'i hagiography written in the late 1960s, the author expressed his hope that the shrine "could be a site of national unity" and serve as a manifestation "of great activity and harmony, and no Pakistani from any *fiqh* is unwelcome here" (Zaidi 2015: 107). With the state taking over the administration of the shrine in 1967, this lofty vision increasingly evaporated. By officially registering the site as a Sunni shrine for the Department of Islamic Endowments (*awqaf*) while also insisting that this should not infringe on established Shi'is rights to express their piety, the authorities waded into a sectarian minefield. The 1970s and 1980s tell a story of revised rules and regulations that became frequently challenged and contested by both Sunni and Shi'i worshippers (Zaidi 2015: 180–235). Does this imply, then, that we have a somewhat comprehensive idea of post-Partition Shi'ism? Not quite. The multifaceted world of Shi'i preaching warrants much more investigation. In particular, the extensive (and constantly increasing) literature of Urdu lamentation poetry and of *majalis* is almost untapped (for exceptions, see Hyder

2006; Howarth 2011). This refers both to printed material and a sheer endless wealth of videos and audio files. Few of those preachers who attract large audiences have been really discussed. An example is Dr. Zameer Akhtar Naqvi, who passed away in September 2020. A gifted but controversial speaker he was not only a prolific author but even turned into somewhat of a meme sensation due to his lively facial expressions when holding *majalis*.³ Yet, as far as I'm aware, no scholarly study exists of his output. If we turn to post-Partition India, the situation appears even more troubling. So far, it is hard to say anything specific about internal Shi'i debates in India and how these were connected to both Pakistan and the Middle East.

This predicament comes to the fore when we consider Sayyid Kalb-i Sadiq (d. 2020). He, too, belonged to the *khandan-i ijtihad* and was a close disciple of Sayyid 'Ali Naqvi. During his lifetime, Kalb-i Sadiq served as the vice president of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. He was a renowned *majlis* preacher and was involved in a wide range of charitable projects. Despite his importance, there is only one dedicated study which analyzes Kalb-i Sadiq's "comprehensive" notion of justice, which allegedly forms the central aspect of his outreach to Indian society as a whole. Muslims are supposed to strive for a socially just world in which the rights of all human beings irrespective of religion and gender are guaranteed. Although he was a follower (*muqallid*) of 'Ali al-Sistani, Kalb-i Sadiq claimed the right for independent thinking and to decide how to apply his *marji's* rules to the specific South Asian context (Sikand 2006). I will touch upon some further lacunae (especially related to gender and Sufism) in the next section and the conclusion. What I would like to highlight here, however, is that our Shi'i jigsaw puzzle looks particularly incomplete as far as post-Partition India is concerned, even in the more recent years.

The implications of a revolution

The third major turning point addressed here is the Iranian Revolution of 1979. This event energized Shi'is (and many Sunnis) in South Asia and in other locales beyond Iran. Even though the lion's share of the (admittedly slim) literature on the impact of the Iranian Revolution focuses on the supposed "export" of Shi'i Islam, the success of the revolution had more to do with its original connection to Third-Worldism and its effort to put the disenfranchised center stage (Nunan 2020). Ripples across Asia went far beyond sectarian allegiances. In Central Asia, various Sunni groups fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets (and their own communist government) appropriated powerful Shi'i symbols (Fuchs 2017: 197–198). In Southeast Asia, Malaysian (Sunni) student groups "advocated the formation of an *ulama*-led Islamic Republic along the Iranian model" (Liow 2009: 34–37).

In both India and Pakistan, students and junior religious scholars were inspired to redefine essential aspects of their faith by inter alia "rationalizing" Shi'i practices (Gupta 2014; Mirza 2014). So far, however, a simplistic conception of how local actors have navigated Iran's revolutionary message has dominated our understanding of the implications of Khomeini's rise to power. In fact, it was *not* the case that before 1979 Shi'i organizations were "apolitical and concerned with rituals and the organization of Muharram processions only" (Abou Zahab 2002: 97). This becomes clearer if we consider the 1960s in Pakistan. The influential 'alim Sayyid Muhammad Dihlavi (1899–1971) assembled 250 Shi'i 'ulama at a convention in Karachi in 1964, and subsequently established Shi'a Mutalabat Committees (Shi'a Demands Committees) throughout the country. Dihlavi and his movement called for full freedom and protection for self-flagellation (*azadari*), separate religious instruction in public schools, and the administration of Shi'i *awqaf* (religious endowments) by Shi'is only. Faced with repeated delaying tactics and bans on public speaking, Dihlavi issued an ultimatum to the Pakistani government in July

1967 to accept their “apolitical, religious, and constitutional demands” within three months. When some 15,000 Shi’is gathered in Rawalpindi after the expiration of the deadline to discuss strategy for the suggested civil disobedience campaign, the government, under the military ruler Ayub Khan (in office 1958–1969), finally relented, only a couple of days before its own downfall (Rieck 2015: 114–124).

After 1979, Shi’i organizing was hardly any different. In fact, the initial impact of the Iranian Revolution was precisely mitigated by certain prevalent Pakistani concerns. Under the leadership of Mufti Ja’far Husayn (d. 1983), the Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Ja’fariyyah (Movement for the Implementation of Shi’i Law) continued to operate according to the time-honored strategy of confronting the state to secure Shi’i rights without turning into a compliable Iranian client. Mufti Ja’far’s approach manifested itself in a forceful Shi’i backlash in June 1980 after the government of yet another military ruler, Zia ul-Haq (in office 1977–1988), revealed its plan to deduct *zakat* (obligatory Islamic charity payment) from all bank accounts held by Pakistani Muslims. The Shi’is, due to far-reaching legal differences in this regard, vehemently opposed these plans. Demonstrations engulfing the entire country culminated in a two-day siege of Islamabad’s government district by Shi’is from all over Pakistan on 5 July 1980. Faced with such strong Shi’i protests, the Zia regime finally capitulated (Fuchs 2019: 134–135). The following years also saw careful navigation: even those Shi’i activists who were clearly inspired by the Iranian example, or had even studied in Iran, remained cautious. Sayyid ‘Arif Husayn al-Husayni (d. 1988), Pakistan’s most important Shi’i leader of the 1980s, stressed some hallmark themes of the Revolution, such as anti-imperialism, his striving for Muslim unity, and a dominant societal role for the Shi’i *‘ulama*. Yet, he too was forced to downplay his commitment to the Iranian system of government. Al-Husayni never used the charged term of “guardianship of the jurisconsult” (*vilayat-i faqih*) but rather argued that the Iranian example was restricted to the economic realm.

Given this emphasis on continuity, why have I singled out 1979 as a turning point? I argue that what really changed for all Shi’is in Pakistan, regardless of whether they embraced the Iranian Revolution or thought it was a manifestation of religious “fanaticism,” was the new level of sectarianism they started to face. From the early 1980s, anti-Shi’i groups, most notably among them the Sipah-i Sahabah-i Pakistan (The Army of the Companions of the Prophet) became an organized force in both rural and urban contexts. A group of predominantly Deobandi authors, named after their affiliation with a famous reformist Sunni religious seminary in North India (Ingram 2018; Metcalf 1982), led the charge. These anti-Shi’i polemicists hailed from both India and Pakistan, a famous representative being the Indian scholar Manzur Nu’mani, who in 1984 published *Irani inqilab, Imam Khumayni awr Shi’iyyat* (The Iranian Revolution, Khomeini, and Shi’ism). It was, however, a Pakistan-specific development that Shi’is now began to be perceived as a threat to the imagined nation. It needs to be recalled that the Muslim homeland’s origins as an ideological state was built on the idea of Muslim separatism, and it was endowed with the promise of giving Islam the political form that it had not enjoyed for centuries (Devji 2014).

After 1979, sectarian Deobandi actors turned up their anti-Shi’i rhetoric, eager to disqualify Shi’is from the common deliberation about how to envision an ideal Islamic polity. In order to counter the rival Islamic Republic next door, activists of the Sipah-i Sahaba resorted to fascinating forms of Shi’i mimicry. They modeled their veneration of the Companions of the Prophet on Shi’i devotion to the Imams and tried to come up with public rituals that could outdo the Shi’i original (Fuchs 2019: 169–179). Shi’i thinkers and activists, in turn, have reacted in various ways to this challenge. While often accusing outside forces, they have put forward as diverse solutions as turning Pakistan into a secular state, rendering it into an Islamic state that

was strictly “sectarianly unaligned,” or even claiming that *vilayat-i faqih* was the only way forward (Saif 2020: 236–278).

Conclusion: Where do we go from there?

As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, we still have only a very narrow and partial understanding of Shi'i dynamics in the Subcontinent, in both the early modern and contemporary periods. This also means that several avenues for further research open themselves up if we want to hope to paint a more nuanced and detailed picture. Building on Qasim Zaman's recent investigation of the demise of modernist Islam in Pakistan (Zaman 2018), we should ask which role Shi'i authors played in the emergence of this particular vision of Islam in the first place. Many of the leading anthologies have so far either ignored South Asian Shi'is, or not considered particular Shi'i paths to modernism (Ahmad 1967; Enayat 1982). Similarly, one wonders how to theoretically conceptualize spaces such as Sehwan Sharif in rural Sindh, where the mausoleum of the famous saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (d. 1274) is located. While the saint is claimed by several spiritual genealogies, the Shi'i atmosphere, reflected in inscriptions and architecture, is very palpable without Sunni worshipers taking any objection (Boivin 2011). What can this shared Sunni–Shi'i devotion during the saint's annual death anniversary (*urs*) tell us about sectarianism in Pakistan today? This also leads us to the largely unexplored world of Shi'i Sufism, manifested, for example, by the many shrines among the Turi Shi'i tribe in Kurram near the Afghan border (Hollister 1946). Relatedly, Shi'i life worlds in South Asia, beyond scholarly tracts and legal arguments, warrant far deeper investigation by anthropologists in order to flesh out how “the power and extensive patronage network” of owners of large rural estates who are also Shi'i sayyid *pirs* sustain the influence of popular preachers (Rollier 2019: 678; Ruffle 2011). It is regrettable that there are hardly any studies of female Shi'i religious authority in both India and Pakistan, even though this aspect has received some attention beyond the Subcontinent (Künkler and Fazaeli 2012). As a last point, due to large-scale migration of Shi'is with a South Asian background, many of these debates alluded to above are no longer confined to India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh but have taken on a life of their own in Europe, the US, and East Africa (Scharbrodt and Shanneik 2020). I hope that by applying such fresh lenses and enriching a growing field, the vitality and creativity of Shi'i Islam in South Asian will come to the fore in ways that my three turning points have only tried to crudely sketch.

Notes

- 1 Rob Gleave has cautioned that Akhbaris are not “simple ‘literalists’ as they are sometimes portrayed in both Shi'i and secondary literature, but rather scholars, with a vehement commitment to the maintenance of scholarly authority and the tradition of Shi'i learning.” For a detailed treatment of the Usuli-Akhbari divide, see Gleave 2007.
- 2 Shaykhi theology within Twelver Shi'ism goes back to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753–1826) and emerged as a distinctive school after the Shi'i 'alim Muhammad-Taqi Baraghani (d. 1847) proclaimed *takfir* of al-Ahsa'i for denying the return of the physical body at the time of the resurrection. The third master of the school, Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani (d. 1870), developed an idea al-Ahsa'i had only alluded to. He supplemented the first three pillars of the Shi'i profession of faith, namely God's unicity (*tauhid*), the mission of the prophets (*nubuwwa*), and the mission of the Imams (*imama*), along with a fourth. This “fourth pillar” (*al-nukn al-rabi'*) was meant to denote the true Shi'is, “those initiated into the Imams' esoteric teachings, the worthiest of whom are in spiritual relation with the Hidden Imam.” The existence of this spiritual elite is necessary because without it “all humanity would lose the transcendental meaning of its being and sink into the darkness of impious ignorance.” Such teachings – and Karim Khan's efforts to establish his own supreme religious authority – antagonized the leading Shi'i

scholars in Iran and Iraq, since their *raison d'être* was challenged and their “understanding of the true faith” labeled as “shallow and incomplete” (Amir-Moezzi 2001; Bayat 1982).

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxqBsmvtCxU>

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MAKING ISLAMIC FINANCE IN SOUTH ASIA

The state, the seminary, and the business corporation

Sohaib Khan

Introduction: Religious and financial assemblages

It is now widely recognized that the history of Islam in Asia is tied to trans-regional networks of trade and commerce. Commercial vehicles were not only a major driving force behind Islam's historical mobility, they also mapped its circuitous routes of expansion into Asia. Without further qualification, however, this appreciation of Islam's commercial dynamism risks devolving into two problematic assumptions regarding the presence of Islam in Asia. The first is economistic, as it grants causal priority to economic factors in explaining Islam's penetration in Asia. The second is ethnolinguistic, in that it uses Islam's *outward* commercial expansion – from Arabia to the rest of Asia – as evidence for the normative claim that Islam's roots must be transfixed in the Arabian Peninsula. These economistic and ethnolinguistic assumptions reinforce each other and may be captured in an admittedly clichéd reference to trade and manufacturing: Islam was produced in Arabia and later exported to the rest of Asia, only to be circulated as a counterfeit of its original self. What counts as authentically Islamic as opposed to derivative or imitative is, therefore, inextricably tied to authoritative discourses on economic and linguistic registers of Islam.

Scholars have rarely considered historical interrelations between the discursive and technical-material dimensions of Islamic phenomena, often studying one in isolation from the other. For instance, humanistic critiques of Orientalist approaches to the textual study of Islam seldom cross over into domains of commerce and material exchange as legitimate avenues of Islamic inquiry. Consequently, economistic assumptions are critiqued from a distance, but hardly contested on the historical and empirical territory they claim to describe. A proper reckoning with the mutual effects of economistic thinking and ethnolinguistic hierarchies in the study of Islam, therefore, requires breaking with old disciplinary habits of treating textual discourses as a surrogate for material practices and vice versa.

In this chapter, I present a modern history of Islam's financial trajectories in South Asia, with a particular focus on Islamic finance in Pakistan. I argue that South Asia's transition from a pre-colonial era of mercantile capitalism to contemporary regimes of global finance has transformed Islamic commercial law from a cosmopolitan legal tradition to a standardized code of corporate

governance. While such standardization has facilitated the integration of modern institutions of Islamic banking and finance in circuits of global capital, it has also deracinated Islamic commercial law from its organic roots in local customs and everyday commercial life in South Asia. Rather than presenting this history as the unfolding of an Asian chapter within a universal logic of capitalist transition, or as the fateful subsumption of religion by secular forces of the market, I describe the workings of Islamic finance in South Asia through a moving assemblage of state institutions, religious seminaries, and transnational financial corporations.

My usage of “assemblages” decenters both economistic and ethnolinguistic frameworks for understanding the consolidation of Islam in Asian contexts. First, it allows us to see how religious, political, and economic institutions and actors shape each other through historically contingent alignments (Connolly 2008; Ong and Collier 2007; Rudnyckyj and Osella 2017). An assemblage is a coming together of heterogeneous elements in a series of entanglements that both constrain and alter their individual effects. Unlike a tightly constructed mechanism or a logical structure of causal relations, the relative force and movement of each element within an assemblage varies in relation to others. Further, assemblages are susceptible to reconfiguration and disruption owing to both external shocks and internal friction between their elements. This perspective puts into question the analytical separation of economics from politics, corporations from the state, and secular rationality from religious dispositions.

In the context of Islamic finance, attention to state–capital–religion assemblages enables a more sophisticated understanding of how religious phenomena escape the confines of traditional religious institutions and become intertwined with political and commercial practices. Conversely, instead of assuming the autonomy of the economic form or conceding its self-contained character, we are able to appreciate how financial institutions and actors may be infused with a religious ethos. Scholars have largely relied on the concept of assemblages to describe modern phenomena as constituted by mutual imbrications between techno-scientific and human collectives (Rabinow 2003). While drawing on this scholarship, I also extend assemblages to account for dissonant conjunctions between premodern knowledge traditions and modern institutions. This approach is crucial to understanding Islamic finance not only in terms of its location within global financial infrastructures, but also as a product of the evolving textual repertoire of Islamic commercial law. Without a genealogical engagement with indigenous knowledge traditions and forms of expertise that authorize Islamic finance, studies under the rubric of “Islam and neoliberalism” tend to reduce Islam itself to an epiphenomenon of the developmental state or global capitalism. Finally, research on Islamic finance is particularly well-suited to unravelling normative hierarchies that imagine an Arab center and Asian periphery in the study of Islam. Given the prominence of places like Malaysia (Rudnyckyj 2018; Sloane-White 2017) and Pakistan (Khan 2015) in engineering the technical and legal architecture of Islamic finance, the field of Islamic studies has much to learn from an industry that is shaping the Muslim world’s relationship to global capitalism.

This chapter addresses the aforementioned themes in a summary fashion by tracing the history of Islamic finance in South Asia in four chronological sections. In the first section, I consider the role of Islamic law in maintaining a cosmopolitan commercial order in the Indian Ocean, c. the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries. The second section details the dissolution of this cosmopolitan world following the colonization of South Asia and its integration in a global economic order of colonial governance. The latter part of this section situates Pakistan’s foundational aspiration to model an “Islamic economy” within the post-World War II era of financial globalization underwritten by the United States. The third section then diagnoses the vexed career of Pakistan’s state-sponsored Islamization project in the context of its financial dependency on international donors and military involvement in the US-led war against communism.

In the aftermath of Pakistan's failure to restructure its national economy along Islamic lines, the fourth section locates the emergence of a market-based private sector of Islamic banking and finance. I examine the critical role played by the orthodox Indo-Pakistani clerical community, the Deobandīs, in authorizing the Islamic finance industry by serving as the legal architects of its products and services. Further, I explore ethical contestations within Pakistan's Deobandī community over the project of tailoring Islamic law to meet the needs of modern finance and the sociological consequences of integrating *madrassa* graduates in financial professions. The chapter concludes with a section on standardization, in which I consider the role of transnational private regulatory regimes in translating Islamic commercial law into a set of best practices and standard operating procedures for modern financial institutions. I lay out the stakes of this translation by contrasting the interpretive pluralism of Islamic commercial law as a cosmopolitan legal tradition with its modern objectification into a system of regulatory compliance.

An Islamicate cosmopolitanism: Law and commerce in the Indian Ocean

The study of Islam and capitalism in much Euro-American scholarship reflects a longstanding disciplinary divide between philologists and social historians: on the one hand are scholars who focus on the economic "ideology" of Islam as articulated in its doctrinal sources (Rodinson 1974) and, on the other are those who mine archival records so as to reflect on actually existing commercial institutions and practices in the Muslim world (Gran 1979). This academic division of labor perpetuates an Orientalist creed regarding an intractable dissonance between Islam's ideal theory and its vernacular practices (Messick 2018). Not surprisingly, the distance between the Islamic ideal and its various approximations is mapped onto an Arabian center and its Muslim peripheries (Formichi 2020).

Calls to decenter the ethnolinguistic privileging of Arabia in the study of Islam typically revert to some form of Islamicate cosmopolitanism that is marked by a plurality of religious, cultural, and linguistic forms. More recently, a groundbreaking intervention in the field of Islamic studies has suggested evacuating from Islam the concept of orthodoxy altogether (Ahmed 2015). According to this argument, it is only by dispensing with the notion of orthodoxy as "prescriptive authority" that we can begin to appreciate the cosmopolitan dimensions of Islam as nurtured by a form of "explorative authority" (282). While this aesthetic approach may seem amenable to exploring the range of literary genres and creative expressions within Islam's "Balkans to Bengal complex" (32–33), its analytical scope is insufficient to understanding dynamics of commercial exchange. Besides, the flourishing of difference, diversity, and contradiction in a cosmopolitan tradition does not in and of itself indicate a negation of orthodoxy or even its absence. In so far as contestations of truth, meaning, and value in any culture are inflected by relations of power, orthodoxy is not something that can be wished away. Instead, what needs to be questioned is a juridical conception of orthodoxy and its association with an ethnolinguistic epicenter. This analytical move requires decoupling the idea of orthodoxy from a singular site of production and charting its dissemination into multiple zones of operation. Beyond the utopian spaces of literary imagination, Islamic commercial networks provide a rich illustration of the spaces of difference or "heterotopias" that integrate relations of power with forms of discursive and material exchange (Foucault 1986).

Once we enter the domain of commerce, we are confronted with a bewildering cosmopolitanism of Islamicate commercial practices and their textual discourses that defy any transhistorical notion of Islamic orthodoxy. A brief look at mercantile trade networks across the Indian Ocean prior to the twentieth century can help us appreciate how Islam was constitutive of a

commercial assemblage that was neither reducible to religious doctrine nor economic rationality. Recent histories of the Indian Ocean economy (Bishara 2017; Ho 2006; Prange 2018) have shown that the flow of commodities from one place to another entailed much more than individual acts of material exchange. Long-distance trade was in fact premised on the existence of an elaborate legal, financial, communicational, and political infrastructure.

Networks of trust that allowed Gujarati merchants from India to farm customs at trading posts in Bandar Abbas, Muscat, and Zanzibar – based in present-day Iran, Oman, and Tanzania respectively – were undergirded by a shared legal language, financial conventions, cross-cultural literacy, and trans-regional systems of political patronage. Such networks operated under overlapping jurisdictions that distributed authority between spatially differentiated actors and institutions. The power to define the truth or prescribe correct practice thus didn't reside in a single institutional authority. To the contrary, the discursive norms and practical conventions of commerce acquired their stability through a series of tacit and negotiated agreements between political authorities, religious scholars, and commercial actors. Just as these norms and conventions were susceptible to contestation owing to shifting relations of power between these actors, the ebbs and flows of transregional commerce did not translate into unilateral Arab influence over Anatolia, Persia, India, and Sumatra. Instead, each of these regions shaped the idiom of the *sharī'a* or Islamic law according to its local customs and conventions, thereby contributing to the formation of a cosmopolitan space that may provisionally be called "Asian Islam." I insist on this provisional usage owing to difficulties in circumscribing Asia as a unitary cultural and historical project. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2016) has correctly noted, any historical attempt to define Asia as a coherent space involves political choices and decisions. For this particular volume, the major stake in articulating an idea of Asian Islam is to decenter the Orientalist legacy of equating normative Islam with Arabia.

Further, while the reciprocal obligations attending commodity exchange and creditor-debtor relations in the Indian Ocean network were governed by Islamic commercial law, the law itself was not exclusively derived from a repository of canonical texts authored in Arabia. Islamic legal texts and practices were deeply entwined with the linguistic and commercial customs of the extended geographies in which they travelled. As Brinkley Messick (2018) has recently argued, the textual architecture of the *sharī'a* may broadly be divided into two levels of discourse: the library and the archive. Both levels manifest genre-specific discursive and spatiotemporal horizons. In the realm of Islamic commercial law, library texts include doctrinal literature and formal-theoretical treatises on principles of exchange and model contracts. The archive, on the other hand, consists of context-specific documentary records of everyday commercial transactions. It is through dialogical interactions between these two levels of discourse that the theoretical framework of Islamic commercial law adjusted to actual market customs and practices.

In summary, as networks of trade transported ivory, cloves, and slaves across the Indian Ocean and beyond, they also facilitated the movement of goods, ideas, languages, cultures, cuisines, financial techniques, and legal instruments. Islamic commercial law not only regulated these exchanges but also absorbed and adapted to the cosmopolitan world they created. It was, therefore, both systemic in that it held together transregional networks of trade and commerce, and yet internally diverse owing to its organic roots within local customs and traditions.

Colonialism, globalization, and Pakistan's state-capital-religion assemblage

The legal and commercial arrangements of this "mercantile cosmopolis" (Flood 2009) were significantly altered with the rise of European maritime powers and the British colonization of

India in the eighteenth century. Networks of transregional trade previously governed by Islamic commercial law were gradually integrated into a new paradigm of globalization underwritten by colonial rule. David Ludden (2005) locates the modern transformation of South Asia's economy in what he describes as the rise of colonial and post-colonial "development regimes." The first emerged under global connections forged by British colonialism; the second followed decolonization and World War II, marked by the dominance of American finance capitalism.

Under colonial governance, local property rights regimes were reorganized through the introduction of "universal" legal principles of private ownership and their attendant legal and bureaucratic infrastructures (Mitchell 2002: 55–59). These reforms were formatively engineered by European "company-states" that colonized large swaths of South Asia and the Malay Archipelago by the early nineteenth century, and later strengthened under direct colonial rule (Phillips and Sharman 2015; 2020; Stern 2011). In the particular case of British India, colonial governance embarked on a massive development regime that involved investments in transportation and irrigation infrastructure and, crucially, a range of disciplinary institutions geared towards fashioning a docile citizenry. This development regime was financed by global trade arrangements designed to enrich British businesses at the expense of local industries. By 1833, for instance, tariffs on Indian cloth decimated the local textile industry, while cheap Indian cotton exported to Britain allowed the Lancashire textile industry to thrive in international markets (Ludden 2005: 4043). British industries enjoyed rampant protectionism through further non-tariff barriers that were imposed on local production to undermine the latter's low-cost advantages in labor and raw materials (4044).

When this colonial machinery of governance was inherited by newly independent nation-states, the infrastructural and bureaucratic arrangements designed to manage massive populations were cut off from previously available financial resources of Empire. In the case of Pakistan, for instance, the absence of a pre-existing centralized government in the north-western and north-eastern parts of colonial India – reconstituted in 1947 as West and East Pakistan – created a governance conundrum. Further, reliance on exports of jute and cotton as the primary sources of state income compounded the financial difficulties of settling a massive influx of refugees and maintaining exorbitant defense expenditures (Jalal 1990: 267). At the same time, global financial dominance after World War II had steadily shifted from Britain to the United States. With the Bretton Woods agreement in 1944, the former colonial powers yielded the task of global development to supranational institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Strapped for cash and struggling to meet increasing defense budgets and development expenditures at home, Pakistan soon turned to these institutions headquartered in the US for financial bailouts. These loans came with conditions of structural adjustment that systematically undercut government subsidies and welfare spending in favor of privatization, deregulation, and other forms of economic liberalization. From its very inception, therefore, Pakistan was conscripted in circuits of global financial capital that would constrain its "aspirational tendency" to strive for an Islamic future (Khan 2012).

A constitutional amendment in 1956 formally sanctioned Pakistan's status as an "Islamic Republic." This early combination of ceremonial deism and financial dependency on an American-led order of globalization proved consequential to the configuration of a very peculiar state–capital–religion assemblage. As with most postcolonial nation-states that inherited a colonial bureaucracy ill-suited to democratic governance (Kaviraj 2010: 25), Pakistan's military establishment gained an upper hand in deciding the country's political trajectory and resource allocation soon after its inception. This imbalance of power between the military and other branches of the state was primarily a function of regional power dynamics and the need to establish state jurisdiction and administrative capacity in a country split into two geographical

zones about 1,300 miles apart. Defense of the newly created state against a much larger and resourceful India became the pretense for prioritizing domestic military spending over other development sectors (Jalal 1990: 270). Further, Pakistan's geostrategic location as a frontier state in the path of an expanding Soviet Union became a high-stakes pitch for seeking military aid from the US (268–269). As Pakistan became a major Cold War ally and proxy state of the US during the Soviet–Afghan War, the military's enrichment through US aid cemented its near political monopoly over the country.

Historian Ayesha Jalal has persuasively argued that the crisis of domestic legitimacy resulting from Pakistan's military rule and its financial dependence on the US gave impetus to the state-sponsored project of Islamization (267). In general, Cold War-era politics in the Muslim world fomented a series of alliances and elective affinities between Islamist forces and the American brand of liberal capitalism. Oil-rich states in the Arabian Gulf fueled their petrodollars in critical regions of the Middle East to mobilize Islamist forces against secular socialists who promoted pan-Arabism, heretical Shi'ites who extended Iran's regional influence, and godless Soviets who threatened the world's religious and capitalist freedoms with communism.

The fact that the religious, political, and financial interests of authoritarian Muslim regimes aligned so effectively with the global aspirations of American capitalism has led Timothy Mitchell (2011) to reformulate the conventional opposition between forces of “tribalism and globalism” into the provocative term “McJihad.” Mitchell defines the era of McJihad as one in which “the mechanisms of what we call capitalism appear to operate, in certain critical instances, only by adopting the social force and moral authority of conservative Islamic movements” (203). Pakistan's regional entanglement in McJihad politics and warfare also led to a major reorientation in the state's domestic religious priorities. The military establishment, now empowered beyond measure with Saudi assistance and US patronage, embarked on a massive Islamization project of the state's laws and economy. Not unsurprisingly, Pakistan's Islamization coincided with the birth of Islamic banking and finance in the Middle East in the 1970s. The Pakistani experiment soon became a “hallmark” of state-sponsored Islamization in the Muslim world (Khan and Bhatti 2008: xix).

Islamization of Pakistan's economy and the birth of Islamic banking

Islamization in Pakistan began in 1977 during the reign of President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. While scholars studying this era have largely focused on reforms in criminal law, punitive institutions, and the more spectacular manifestations of Islamization (Nasr 2010; Peters 2005; Toor 2007; 2011), less has been written on Islamization as a practice of economic governance. One of the central aims of General Zia's Islamization project was to transform Pakistan's economy along Islamic lines. The “Islamic” designator in economic matters entailed a total elimination of interest from the country's financial dealings due to its prohibition in the *sharī'a*.¹ To this end, the Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutional body whose task was to advise the government on Islamic affairs, gathered a group of economists, bankers, Muslim modernists, and traditionally trained religious scholars (*ʿulamā*) to design a workable blueprint for an Islamic economy. The document produced by this governmental body, more popularly referred to as the “1980 report,” is arguably the first comprehensive attempt at modelling an interest-free economy by a postcolonial Islamic state (Bhatti and Khan 2008: 104).

The 1980 report struck a reasoned balance between idealism and pragmatism, suggesting both long-term goals of economic Islamization and the short-term compromises necessary to achieve them (79). The long-term goals reflected ethical ideals of socioeconomic justice and Muslim frustrations against economic inequality and exploitation, as had forcefully been

propounded by prominent Islamist thinkers such as the Indian-Pakistani Abū 'l-A'ālā Mawdūdī (d. 1979), the Egyptian Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), and the Iranian Ali Shariati (d. 1977) (Tripp 2006). To rectify these economic injustices in the long term, the report recommended eliminating interest by reorganizing the economy along Islamic principles of equity financing, mutualization of risk, and profit and loss sharing. The contractual models for these asset-based forms of trade and venture capital had been developed through centuries in Islamic commercial law as *muḍāraba* and *mushāraka* (Udovitch 1970). Despite putting forward an economic redistribution agenda, the report did not suggest adopting a socialist economy, an obvious implication of the fact that it was compiled by a state-appointed body during the heyday of Pakistan's "McJihad" alliance against Soviet Russia.

The report also detailed "secondary policy instruments" as short-term compromises that were more accommodating towards a capitalist system (Khan and Bhatti 2008: 81). These instruments were designed to formally meet the religious requirement of abstaining from interest-based sources of income through alternative arrangements of lease (*ijāra*), buy back (*bay' ʿīna*) and mark-up financing (*murābaha*) arrangements. In terms of their financial outcomes, however, they exhibited none of the risk and profit and loss sharing features that were built into classical Islamic contracts of venture capital and equity financing. In fact, for all practical purposes, the report's secondary instruments were functionally equivalent to conventional financial operations that yielded interest. The Islamic authenticity of these instruments derived not on the basis of any substantial difference from their conventional counterparts, but on a practice pejoratively dubbed as "*shari'a* arbitrage," i.e., the exploitation of nominal differences in contractual forms to make them religiously permissible for pious Muslims (Gamal 2006).

General Zia's government launched several legal and institutional reforms to implement the Islamization scheme plotted in the 1980 report. The 1962 Banking Companies Ordinance was amended to allow Islamic banks to perform manufacturing and trading activities under the *muḍāraba* contract: a venture capital partnership between an investor who provided capital and a manager who invested that capital in a business enterprise. The profits yielded from business activity in a *muḍāraba* would be shared between the investor and manager based on an agreed-upon ratio. With these reforms, the legal definition of "financing" was broadened to include interest-free and profit-based commercial activities conducted by Islamic banks (Bhatti and Khan 2008: 107). Several "Mudarabah Companies" propped up to capitalize on this new business model of Islamic finance.

By 1985, the State Bank of Pakistan converted all interest-generating savings deposits in the country to the so-called "Profit and Loss Sharing" (PLS) arrangements modelled on *muḍāraba*. Despite lacking the financial resources of its counterparts in the Arabian Gulf, Pakistan became the first ever Muslim country to enact such a sweeping purge of interest-earning accounts from its economy (Irfan 2015: 13). Arguably, the first ever Islamic bank that operated on an interest-free and profit and loss sharing model was Egypt's Mit-Ghamr, established in 1963. Before it could even serve as a blueprint for other Muslim countries, however, Mit-Ghamr was nationalized by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Further, owing to tensions between Nasser's socialist government and the Muslim Brotherhood, Mit-Ghamr wasn't allowed to operate under an "Islamic" auspice (El-Ashker and Wilson 2006: 335). In sharp contrast, the Pakistani state distinguished itself in the Muslim world as a model for Islamizing the economy. This state-sponsored Islamic intervention, however, proved ineffective and was short-lived.

To begin with, Mudarabah Companies were viewed as risky investments by Pakistani industrialists and merchant capitalists owing to the riskiness of their profit and loss sharing model. While successful initially, these companies came under pressure to provide stable profits to their clients and thus began investing in fixed-return securities. Barely a decade into their

launching, Mudarabah Companies failed to attract investments and lost public confidence amid scandals of violating *shari'a* regulations (Bhatti and Khan 2008: 114–115). The terminal blow was dealt by traditionally trained religious scholars (*'ulamā*), custodians of the Islamic tradition in South Asia, who issued authoritative legal edicts (*fatāwā*, sing. *fatwā*) declaring the government's PLS instruments fraudulent and in violation of Islamic commercial law (Usmani n.d.). The failure of Mudarabah Companies had both symbolic and institutional consequences as it registered the unfeasibility of profit and loss sharing ventures. Further, it motivated an even greater reliance on those “secondary instruments” of Islamic financing that carried little noticeable difference from conventional finance (Ahmad and Khan 2020: 400).

The most significant obstacle towards the Islamization of Pakistan's economy, however, was the government's own financial dependence on the post-World War II global development regime. It was impractical for the government to take loans from the IMF and, at the same time, curb market operations at home involving the sale of interest-bearing government bonds and securities (Bhatti and Khan 2008: 101). In addition to Pakistan's international debt obligations, the military establishment's commitment to the order of “McJihad” thrust its Islamization project into a set of intractable contradictions. In exchange for Pakistan's military services in the Cold War, the US temporarily increased Pakistan's cotton and textile exports quota to Euro-American markets under the Multifiber Arrangement (MFA) – an arrangement originally instituted to protect Western textile industries from developing country competition. With increasing exports, General Zia's decade-long reign brought economic stability to Pakistan and a steady annual growth rate of 6–7% (Khanna 2010: 43). This macroeconomic prosperity, however, also came at the cost of denationalization, deregulation, and privatization.

Contrary to the neoliberal dogma of capitalism's association with individual liberty and freedom, the Islamization of Pakistan's criminal code and its sanctioning of state suspicion through public surveillance created a secure climate for private enterprise. After all, free markets tend to thrive best when protected by the “Rule of Law” and a strong juridical infrastructure (Foucault 2010; Harcourt 2011). But while General Zia's Islamization went hand in hand with economic liberalization, it also undermined the very long-term goals of socioeconomic justice that the government initially set out to achieve. Despite the regime's religious aspirations, Pakistan's economy could not be Islamized by the stroke of a pen. Its collateral commitments to American-led globalization posed real constraints on what the government could accomplish domestically.

This history of state-sponsored Islamization highlights both the state's agency and its limitations in promoting Islamic finance in South Asia. It is also meant to caution against narratives of Islamization that tend to reduce religion into an instrument of political legitimization. When scholars rationalize Islamization as a domestic counterweight to Pakistan's foreign policy alignment with US interests (Jalal 1990: 267), or claim that “the demand for an Islamic financial system was irrevocably linked to the demand for an Islamic state” (Khan 2015: 6), they invest the state with a decisive causal power in determining the fate of Islam. But as the analysis in the proceeding section shows, the failure of state-sponsored Islamization did not follow the retreat of religion into places of worship. The Islamic banking project was reconfigured into a global assemblage whose institutional reach far exceeded the bureaucratic and administrative capacities of the state.

Pakistan's Deobandis and the *Madrasa*–Islamic finance alliance

While the alliances of “McJihad” were a catalyst in propelling projects of Islamization, they did not exhaust the range of possible alignments between religion and techno-politics in the

modern Muslim world. Contrary to Mitchell's uncharacteristically decided claim that the "more closely a government is allied with Washington, the more Islamic its politics" (Mitchell 2011: 201), Pakistan's second breakthrough in Islamic finance was spearheaded by an orthodox clerical community known as the Deobandīs. As one of the most influential Sunnī sectarian denominations in South Asian Islam, today the Deobandīs run a massive *madrasa* network in Pakistan that operates independently of state bureaucracy and also harbors a strong anti-Americanist sentiment (Zaman 2002: 139). Named after the Dār al-'Ulūm seminary founded in 1867 in the UP Province in British India, the Deobandīs are a scholarly community devoted to preserving and propagating the knowledge traditions of the Ḥanafite school of Islamic jurisprudence (Moosa 2015). In contrast to their more secular leaning co-religionists in India, Pakistan's Deobandīs have supported an aggressive state-sponsored Islamization agenda. Since the era of General Zia-ul-Haq, the Deobandīs strongly advocated elimination of interest from the country's economy (Zaman 2018: 276). Following the failures of economic Islamization, however, they found institutional allies in private-sector Islamic banks. The turn to Islamic banks only came after much frustration with the state's inability to reform the economy along Islamic lines.

Muftī Taqī Usmani is a Deobandī figure of transnational influence and one of the pioneers of modern Islamic finance. Prior to his association with private financial corporations, he worked tirelessly with state institutions to Islamize Pakistan's economy. As one of the sitting judges in Pakistan's "Federal Shariat Court," Usmani passed a detailed verdict in 1991 declaring the country's interest-based economic system unconstitutional. The higher Supreme Court of Pakistan, however, did not ratify Usmani's verdict in consideration of 67 petitions submitted against it by banks, industrialists, and corporate lobbyists (Bhatti and Khan 2008). Usmani did not back down. In 2000, as a judge of the "Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan," he authored a point-by-point rebuttal of all arguments made in previous petitions for sustaining an interest-based economy (Usmani 2008: vol. 6). No action was taken on Usmani's verdict yet again, and subsequent judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan kept sending it back to the lower Federal Shariat Court for review. For Usmani and the Deobandīs, these delaying tactics reflected a lack of political will within state institutions to introduce consequential Islamic reforms. Since General Zia's regime, Deobandī efforts to introduce structural change through state institutions were repeatedly thwarted by the pervasiveness of red tape and a rigid bureaucracy.

In contrast to state institutions, the private sector proved more responsive to the demands of an "Islamic economy" as a niche market in global finance. Upon retirement from his position in the state judiciary, Usmani became chairperson of the "Shari'ah Board" of the transnational private regulatory body called the Auditing and Accounting Organization of Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI). He also penned numerous scholarly works and guides for industry practitioners on how to model Islamic financial contracts, many of which were sponsored by Islamic financial corporations (Usmani 2002). Usmani's writings provided the jurisprudential foundation for a new wave of Islamic financial products and services around the globe. He subsequently worked in an advisory capacity with a number of private Islamic banks in Pakistan as well as the broader Middle East and North America, overseeing their development of "*shari'a* compliant" financial products.

By 2010, the global volume of Islamic financial assets was at \$1 trillion. As of 2019, they are estimated to have reached \$2.88 trillion (DinarStandard 2020). When the sub-prime mortgage crisis hit in 2008, the Islamic finance industry emerged relatively stable from its global impact, partly owing to a lack of exposure to risky and speculative financial assets in Western markets (Irfan 2015: 11). In the aftermath of the crisis, Usmani was invited to the 2010 annual

meeting of the World Economic Forum at Davos to talk about post-crisis financial reforms (18). He used the opportunity to articulate the loftier ideals of Islamic finance as a truly equity-based and profit and loss sharing financial system – the same ideals that were prescribed as the long-term goals of the 1980 report. By 2008, the State Bank of Pakistan had also recognized the burgeoning private sector of Islamic finance. It developed a comprehensive “Shariah Governance Framework” to standardize corporate regulations for Islamic banks. This framework also recognized the importance of Islamic jurisprudential expertise in guaranteeing the authenticity and reputation of Islamic finance operations. It provided clear guidelines regarding the qualifications and hiring of “Shari’ah Advisors” and “Shari’ah Compliance Officers” in Islamic banks (Ahmad and Khan 2020). Thanks to the efforts of Usmani and his Deobandī comrades, these official guidelines opened the door for *madrasa* graduates to enter lucrative careers in finance.

Today, several Deobandī *madrasas* in Pakistan provide a ready supply chain of expertise to Islamic banks. As financial corporations, Islamic banks have been eager to operationalize jurisprudential expertise by accommodating *madrasa*-trained jurists or *mufītīs* in positions of audit, product development, and compliance. *Madrasas*, on the other hand, have introduced curriculum reforms suited to demands of the Islamic banking industry. In addition to the eight-year long traditional *dars-i niẓāmī* curriculum focused on developing hermeneutical skills in the Islamic textual tradition, *madrasa* students are now also studying modern subjects including finance and accounting. With these new linkages between *madrasas* and financial corporations, the relevance and applicability of *madrasa* expertise is no longer limited to questions of religious ritual or personal law. It is almost as if the market had taken up the state’s failed promise of Islamization.

The emergence of private sector Islamic finance made possible what the Pakistani state failed to accomplish: it enabled *madrasa* curriculum reform, integrated *madrasa* students into the societal mainstream, and opened suitable employment avenues for them in secular professions. Compared to a university graduate, employment avenues for *madrasa* students in the past were usually restricted to teaching at other *madrasas* or private religious instruction. A *mufīt* who made a meager Pakistani Rupees (PKR) 15,000 per month could now earn a salary of PKR 30,000–50,000 per month with health benefits as a “Shari’ah Compliance Officer” at an Islamic bank. An experienced *mufīt* who became a “Shari’ah Advisor” could now earn a salary of PKR 1 lakh per month or more, along with corporate benefits and a car for private usage. In terms of salary raises and professional growth, the ideal trajectory for a Pakistani “Shari’ah scholar” is to gain experience in Pakistan’s banking environment and then transition to an Islamic financial institution in the Arabian Gulf. Many *madrasa* students have successfully taken this route. Even though Pakistan ranks eighth in terms of global Islamic finance penetration (DinarStandard 2020: 15) owing to the smaller size of its economy compared to Gulf countries, Pakistani professionals form the disproportionate majority of “Shari’ah scholars” employed by the Islamic finance industry (Khan 2015: 2).

Despite this monumental shift in the fortunes of several Deobandī *madrasas*, Pakistan’s Deobandī establishment remains sharply divided between critics and advocates of Islamic finance. For critics, Islamic finance is a travesty of Islamic commercial law and has made *madrasas* into subcontractors for a capitalist industry trying to profit in the name of Islam (Rufaḳā’ Dār al-Iftā’ 2008). On the other hand, Deobandīs in the camp of Taqī Usmani see their integration in Islamic finance as a necessary pragmatic endeavor to reform capitalism from within. Both sides disagree as to whether *madrasa* graduates can appropriate benefits of modernity without foregoing their adherence to tradition. Their dilemma, however, is not merely an ideological and ethical one. Ultimately, when the material livelihood of *madrasa* students is at stake, the

future of the *madrasa*–Islamic finance alliance will be determined by forces that are not necessarily under the control of Deobandīs themselves.

Standardization and the legal transformation of Islamic law

Since their foundation, Deobandī *madrasas* have served as the bastions of traditional learning in the sciences of Islamic jurisprudence. Trained as jurists, *madrasa* graduates master formal and substantive law according to the Ḥanafite school. As one of the four main schools of jurisprudence (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*) in Sunnī Islam, the Ḥanafite tradition took roots in Northern India from as early as the thirteenth century (Islam 1990). The legal corpus of the Ḥanafite jurisprudential tradition provides a rich historical and conceptual resource on Islamicate commercial practices in South Asia (Sartori 2020). But in order for Islamic commercial law to function within the legal and technological infrastructures of global finance, it first had to be formatted into a code of financial regulations by means of standardization. To this end, Deobandīs working in Islamic banks helped reengineer the textual architecture of Islamic commercial law into a standardized code of financial conduct. The very functionality of Islamic law was thus rearranged into a market-based technique of financial management. In this final section, I want to consider the reasons and historical implications of this transformation of Islamic law through the practice of standardization.

Accumulated over 12 centuries, the Ḥanafite legal canon was internally pluralistic owing to its connections with local customs and legal conventions from Muslim Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Central Asia, and South Asia. Crucially, the diversity of legal opinions within the Ḥanafite school gave its canonical works a highly intertextual format. This sophisticated intertextuality stemmed from the more general dialogical character of traditional Islamic legal texts: they interpreted the *sharīʿa* by citing authorities from the past and engaging interschool and intraschool disagreements on matters of law (Messick 2018). Evidently, interpretive pluralism was ill-suited to the demands of capital mobility and global coordination between financial institutions.

Whereas traditional Islamic law preserved diversity of opinion and practice in a cosmopolitan world by striving towards discursive coherence, modern Islamic financial corporations forged compatibilities of measurement and exchange in global financial markets through standardization (Khan 2020). Since the rise of largescale industrial manufacturing in the nineteenth century, standardization had become a necessary scientific and legal technology to ensure coordination between interlinked processes of manufacturing and trade (Timmermans and Epstein 2010; see also Fischer in this volume, on standardization of *halal* certification for manufactured products). Similarly, in order to conduct transactions efficiently in a competitive financial world, Islamic banks had to codify the *sharīʿa* into a set of standards that exhibited objective clarity, transparency, and decision-usefulness (Maurer 2007).

The global standard-setting organization for Islamic banks and financial institutions is the Auditing and Accounting Organization of Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI), headquartered in Bahrain. Established in 1991, the AAOIFI is made up of traditionally trained scholars of Islamic law, economists, corporate legal experts, and finance industry practitioners. The task of this body is to devise standard operating procedures and codes of conduct for Islamic financial institutions called “Shari’ah Standards” (*al-maʿāyir al-sharʿiyya*). Thus far, the AAOIFI has published 57 standards that cover a range of topics, including rules of issuing credit, currency exchange, proper formatting of contracts, and commercial insurance etc. In 2015, 54 of these standards were collated and published in a 1,264-page tome, titled *Shari’ah Standards* (AAOIFI 2015). The *Shari’ah Standards* is the bible for contemporary Islamic finance practitioners and is adopted by the vast majority Islamic financial institutions in the Middle

East. The authority and prestige of the AAOIFI is further bolstered by its eminent 20-member “Shari’ah Board” with influential scholars from all across the Muslim world, including Taqi Usmani as its chair. A parallel organization to the AAOIFI in Southeast Asia is the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB), headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Rudnyckyj 2018). Together, these organizations set the industry standards for Islamic banking and finance practices globally. In fact, the AAOIFI proudly proclaims the “globality and wide geographical outreach” of its *Shari’ah Standards* (AAOIFI 2015: 7).

The AAOIFI’s modus operandi and the discursive format of its *Shari’ah Standards* stand in sharp contrast with the way Islamic law governed transregional networks of trade and commerce in the Indian Ocean. In the *Shari’ah Standards* volume, the AAOIFI explicitly declares an urgent need to translate Islamic commercial law into a technical language that is suitable to the needs of global finance. The project of standardization is thus undertaken with a view towards homogenizing regional and school-based differences in Islamic commercial law into a universal code of finance. Echoing the sentiments of previous modernizers of Islamic law, the authors of *Shari’ah Standards* reluctantly acknowledge that the intertextuality of Islamic discourse counteracts the clarity needed to isolate distinct meanings and standards of practice. They describe their approach as “selecting the most practical and convenient” content from manuals of jurisprudence, and then deriving “specific rulings in the form of a classified and typified standard” (AAOIFI 2015).

This task of deriving singular and objective prescriptions of financial conduct, however, necessitates suppressing the hermeneutical density and polysemous character of Islamic legal injunctions. The authors of *Shari’ah Standards*, therefore, “grant special consideration to the use of unified terminology” by working towards a “disambiguation” of Islamic legal discourse in “one neat, summarized compilation” (AAOIFI 2015). In the *Shari’ah Standards* volume, therefore, the dialogical modality of Islamic law is transmuted into a monological discourse. The cultural density and hermeneutical contestation that was built into the classical juristic text gives way to the denotational transparency of the standard.

Conclusion

My analysis of *madrasa* relations with the state and business corporations should not be confused with a logic of privatization or an evolutionary perspective of the supersession of the state by financial markets. As the preceding analysis has shown, the *madrasa*–Islamic finance alliance was borne out of Pakistan’s state–capital–religion assemblage. This shift from a state-dominated project of Islamization to a market-based governance of Islamic finance was not guided by logical necessity or historical inevitability. Instead, it was the outcome of contingent historical processes and a moving assemblage between religious seminaries, financial corporations, and state institutions.

Financial corporations had to accommodate expertise in the *shari’ah* provided by *madrasas* so as to capture previously untapped markets. The state, on the other hand, receded into a regulatory role of streamlining compliance of the private sector with laws of the market and the *shari’ah*. Finally, Deobandī *madrasas* found institutional allies in private sector Islamic banks so as to reconfigure financial markets as mechanisms of Islamic reform. The stability and growth of Islamic finance thus critically depended on structures of juridical authority, juristic expertise, and corporate governance provided by the state, religious seminaries, and financial corporations respectively. Situating the history of Islamic finance in South Asia within these complex assemblages allows us to appreciate how its formation was neither a simple extension of Arab influence nor an epiphenomenal effect of purely economic factors.

Note

- 1 Scholarship on economic Islamization tends to use the composite term “Islamic economy” to qualify an empirical-calculative domain of material organization called “the economy.” These terms, however, do not refer to an objectively existing reality. In Timothy Mitchell’s (2002) revealing genealogy of “the economy,” he argues that the term itself is a product of scientific disciplines, technologies of calculation, and modes of governance introduced in the twentieth century. According to Mitchell, one cannot conceive of “the economy” as an aggregated space of quantifiable variables amenable to policy intervention prior to European colonial expansion and its technologies of governance. One could say the same for invocations of an “Islamic state” that erroneously refer to a transhistorical form of political governance. The state itself is an historically unique political arrangement and its mode of sovereignty may often be at odds with the political universe imagined in the historical *sharī’a* (Hallaq 2013).

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12

IN THE *HALAL* ZONES OF MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE¹

Johan Fischer

This chapter argues that *halal* (permissible or lawful) production, trade and standards have become essential to state-regulated Islam and to companies in contemporary Malaysia and Singapore, but also globally. I explore how *halal* in Malaysia and Singapore has evolved to become a major national focus of state, market, and society. For instance, it is now a mandatory requirement that companies set up what is called a Halal Committee in Malaysia and a Halal Team in Singapore consisting of Muslims to ensure the halalness of products. Hence, “*being Malay Muslim*” is seen by the state as *a skill* necessary to produce and handle halal in the two countries. However, as we shall see, these markets are inseparable from the broader landscapes of ethnic identity politics.

Based on participant observation and interviews undertaken with state bureaucracies and manufacturing companies, this chapter builds on a case study of halal manufacturing companies in Malaysia and halal training in Singapore. With comparison used as a powerful conceptual mechanism that fixes attention on the similarities and differences between the two countries, I argue that the state has played a pivotal role in the making and managing of halal markets locally and with global implications.

Halal in Southeast Asia

In Arabic, halal traditionally signifies “pure food” (with regard to meat in particular) that is achieved through proper Islamic practice such as ritual slaughter and pork avoidance. In the modern and globalized industry for not only food but also biotechnology as well as care products, a number of Muslim requirements have been established, such as an injunction to avoid any substances that may be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol, gelatine, glycerine, emulsifiers, enzymes, flavors and flavorings. These requirements are setting new standards for production, preparation, handling, storage, and certification. In the rapidly expanding global market for halal products, Malaysia and Singapore hold a special position, that is, state bodies in both countries certify halal products and halal spaces (shops, factories, and restaurants), as well as work processes. In shops around the world, consumers can find state halal-certified products from Malaysia and Singapore that carry distinctive logos. Globally, companies are affected by the proliferation of halal that to a large extent is evoked by Southeast Asian nations such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. The analysis of halal is situated

in a framework of new governing practices by different Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (Ong 2006). These countries exist in a “double minority” setting that shapes ethnic hierarchies: the Chinese are a majority in Singapore but a minority in the region, whereas the Malays are a minority in Singapore but a strong majority in Malaysia (Mauzy and Milne 2002). Sovereign rule grants each country the authority to create new economic possibilities, spaces, and techniques; for instance, an increased legal focus on Muslims in halal production and regulation in Malaysia and Singapore.

Current studies on the entanglements of capitalism, Islamic identity, and the state in Southeast Asia explore, for example, how moderate Islamic “spiritual reform” movements in Indonesia combine business management principles and popular life-coaching techniques with Muslim practice.³ These forms of “market Islam” and “spiritual economies” merge with entrepreneurship as a way to produce new Muslim citizens, Islamic practices, capitalist ethics, and effective self-management (Rudnyckyj 2010).

This chapter answers the following research question: how and why is halal of special importance in Southeast Asia and Malaysia and Singapore more specifically? And what are its ripples beyond the region? It does so by examining the ways in which cultural, economic, and political processes shape, consolidate, and expand the market for halal products. An important subsidiary question is how the state subjects halal markets to ever-expanding Islamic requirements and new forms of regulation. Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country and major producer of halal products, whereas Singapore is small in size and there are few manufacturing industries in the country. Moreover, the number of Muslims in Singapore is limited, and this community is relatively relaxed about everyday halal consumption. Consequently, the Singaporean market for halal products and services is not so much driven by local demand as in the case of Malaysia; the main impetus for the widening and deepening of halal markets in Singapore is the country’s vision to become the world leader in global halal markets.

This chapter argues that state regulation and politics is essential to the formation of halal in the two countries, more specifically United Malays National Association (UMNO) in Malaysia and the People’s Action Party (PAP) in Singapore. This chapter builds on these arguments by exploring the ways in which the markets for halal products are regulated in Malaysia and Singapore, with specific reference to the involvement of Muslims in that process; that is, the way in which it has become a legal requirement that Muslims are involved in these processes to ensure the halalness of products. Thus, the chapter shall explore how “Islamic” skills have become essential in this specific market by comparing Malaysia and Singapore.

This chapter provides a multisite ethnography of the overlapping technologies and techniques of production, trade, and standards that together warrant a product as “halal” and thereby help to format the market, part of a broader research agenda that focuses on the bigger institutional picture that frames everyday halal consumption; the contact zones or interface zones between Islam and markets through techniques like production, trade, and standards (Fischer 2015). The methodology of this comparative study is based on participant observation and interviews undertaken with state bureaucracies in Malaysia and Singapore, as well as Islamic organizations, companies, shops, and restaurants.

Making modern halal markets

The Koran and the Sunna (the life, actions and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) exhort Muslims to eat the good and lawful food God has provided for them, but a number of conditions and prohibitions are observed. Muslims are expressly forbidden from consuming carrion, spurting blood, pork, and foods that have been consecrated to any being other than God

himself. These substances are haram (unlawful, forbidden). The lawfulness of meat depends on how it is obtained. Ritual slaughtering, known as *dhabh*, entails the animal being killed in God's name by making a fatal incision across the throat. In this process, the blood should be drained out as fully as possible. Divergences between jurists of the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence – Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi'i, which is the school of thought dominant in Malaysia – on halal understanding and practice exist.

Modern halal cannot be understood simply as part of a stable taxonomy. In addition to halal and haram, doubtful things should be avoided, that is, there is a grey area between the clearly lawful and the unlawful (Riaz and Chaudry 2004). To determine whether a foodstuff is halal or haram “depends on its nature and how it is processed/obtained”; in the end, however, the underlying principle behind the prohibitions remains “divine order” (Riaz and Chaudry 2004: 12).

Muslim dietary rules assumed new significance in the twentieth century, as some Muslims began striving to demonstrate how such rules conform to modern reason and the findings of scientific research. Another common theme in the revival and renewal of these dietary rules seems to be the search for alternatives to what are seen to be western values, ideologies, and lifestyles, and this is reflected in globalized halal.

Halal in Malaysia

In Malaysia, a country with a population of 28.3 million according to the 2010 census, 67.4% are indigenous Malays (virtually all Muslims) and tribal groups that together are labelled *bumiputera* (literally, “sons of the soil”); 24.6% are Chinese; 7.3% are Indians; and 0.7% belong to the “other” category (Department of Statistics 2010a). Since Malaysia gained independence from Britain in 1957, Malays have constitutionally only been Malays if they are Muslims, speak the Malay language, and adhere to Malay culture and customs. Malaysia is not an Islamic state, but Islam is Malaysia's official religion and is professed by more than 50% of the population. In principle, Islam's official role was for ceremonial purposes and public occasions while the nation would remain a secular state (Nagata 1994). At the time of independence, the UMNO stressed the constitutional position of Islam as the religion of the country within the framework of a secular state, at least in the eyes of more Islamically oriented groups (Funston 2006). Economically, Malaysia has sustained rapid growth over the past three decades, during which the meaning of Islam has become ever more contested.

The rise of divergent *dakwah* (literally, “invitation to salvation”) groups in the wider resurgence of Islam in Malaysia challenged the secular foundation of the Malaysian state. *Dakwah* is both an ethnic and a political phenomenon that has transformed Malaysia for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Since the 1970s the popular Islamic opposition party called Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), together with *dakwah* groups, criticized the policies of the UMNO-led coalition government for having un-Islamic colonial traditions and secular practices which separated religion from political, social, and economic issues (Jomo and Cheek 1992). By contrast, state authorities suggest that dogmatic forms of *dakwah* represent the decline of Islam due to the arrogant rejection of secular knowledge by *ulama* (religious functionaries) (Milne and Mauzy 1999). To pre-empt *dakwah* groups and PAS, the state has been gradually “nationalizing” Islam (Fischer 2008). In fact, Malaysian Islam today is arguably the most monolithic and most heavily state regulated in the Muslim world (Bakar 2008). Thus, the state's attempt to cultivate a modern form of Malayness is intimately linked to state-sanctioned Islamic discourses or *dakwah*, each with particular ideas and standards of how one should combine consumption and Islamic practice.

Dakwah has initiated a broader fascination with the proper and correct “Islamic way of life.” For example, the ideal Islamic way of life entails consuming specific halal goods, which are seen to have a beneficial impact on domains such as the family, community, and nation. Halal is both a result of the increase in Islamic revivalism and an instrument of the resurgence that leads to ever greater involvement with Islam helping to promote the movement that produced it. Ironically, Islamic revivalist critiques of secularism and the so-called secular state in Malaysia have helped shape and reinforce not only a unique type of powerful UMNO-driven state nationalism in Malaysia, but also a highly commercialized version of Islam in which halal plays a significant role. Although this type of state-driven nationalism can be said to be secular in nature, it feeds into, and is in itself fed by, a whole range of divergent Islamic discourses. The growing centrality of Islam in Malaysian society is also reflected in the bureaucratization of Malay ethnicity, that is, an officially ethnically plural state in which Malays are a favored ethnicity (Lee and Ackerman 1997). An example of an Islamic bureaucratic body set up by the state is the Institute for Islamic Understanding (or IKIM, *Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia*) established in 1992. The priority of state organizations such as the IKIM is to guide Malays to correct and rightful Islamic practices in everyday life. In Malaysia halal is promoted as a bridge between the religious and the secular, and as an example of the compatibility of the ethnicized state, modern Islam, business, and proper Islamic consumption.

During his first two decades in office, the charismatic and outspoken Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad accelerated the process of institutionalizing and regulating halal, and the strict halal requirements of today are largely products of this process. Mahathir was in many ways the architect behind modern Malaysia and the social engineering policies aimed at manufacturing a Malay middle class. Mahathir actively nationalized the proliferation of halal and concentrated its certification in the realm of the state where it has remained ever since. In 1982 the Malaysian state set up a committee to evaluate the certification of halal commodities under the Islamic Affairs Division (later JAKIM, *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*) in the Prime Minister’s Department (Riaz and Chaudry 2004). This committee was exclusively responsible for instilling halal awareness amongst food producers, distributors and importers. The Islamic Affairs Division and the Department of Veterinary Services shared joint responsibility for the mandatory halal certification of all imported meat.

Malaysia places great importance on establishing a national halal assurance system that matches the country’s halal vision, incorporating the standards of the Malaysian MS 1500 (production, preparation, handling, and storage of halal food) and MS 2200 (consumer goods for cosmetic and personal care) as an international benchmark for the state certification of halal products. As part of Malaysia’s vision to become the world leader of halal, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malaysia’s Prime Minister from 2003 to 2009, set out Malaysia’s aspirations to become a global halal hub based on the ability to set international benchmarks for the certification of halal products (Badawi 2006).

Malaysia is a model country in terms of complying with halal standards and has strong halal activity in food processing and the export/import trade as reflected in its systematization and standardization of halal certification. In response to the expansion of food service establishments and the opening of international restaurants in Malaysia from the 1970s onward, a thorough enactment of laws, diverse procedures, and guidelines were established by authorities. For example, the Trade Description (use of expression “halal”) Order of 1975 made it an offense to falsely label food as halal, and the Trade Description Act (halal sign marking) of 1975 made it an offense to falsely claim food to be halal on signs and other markings (Riaz and Chaudry 2004).

The current General Requirements for Halal Certification are far more elaborate than the orders and acts introduced in the 1970s. For instance, every producer or manufacturer, food premises, or slaughterhouse must produce only halal products. Every company that applies for the Halal Confirmation Certificate must ensure that the source of ingredients is halal and they must choose suppliers or sub-contractors that only supply halal goods or have Halal Confirmation Certificates. All companies must ensure that halal procedures are observed in all aspects as underlined in the Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual. Companies that are listed under the Multinational and Small and Medium Industry category are required to establish an Internal Halal Audit Committee and appoint an Islamic Affairs Executive (Islamic Studies) to oversee and ensure compliance of halal certification procedures. Moreover, it is a requirement to have the following: a minimum of two permanent Muslim workers of Malaysian nationality in the kitchen/handling/food processing section; all products, equipment, and appliances must be clean and may not contain non-halal ingredients during preparation, handling, processing, packaging, or transfer; transportation used must be specifically for halal product delivery only; and cleanliness must be ensured through good manufacturing practices (Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia 2016). All of this indicates that halal regulation in the form of certification and standardization have become the central concern of the Malaysian state.

Halal in Singapore

The Singaporean vision is to become a world leader in halal. To achieve this, halal commodities and handling are subjected to increased forms of everyday regulation. This subsection offers a broader context for understanding halal in Singapore. Singapore is a Chinese-majority country while Muslims, of whom most are ethnic Malays, constitute the largest minority, and this has a significant bearing on halal production, trade, consumption, and regulation. Out of 3.77 million Singaporean residents in 2010, the Chinese constituted 74.1%, Malays 13.4%, Indians 9.2%, while ethnic “others” accounted for the remaining 3.3% (Department of Statistics 2010b). This ethnic ratio is partially a reflection of Singapore’s colonial history dating back to 1819 when the British East India Company chose it as a settlement because it was centrally located for trade.

In 1959 the PAP formed a government led by Lee Kuan Yew, who was the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore. Lee governed for three decades until 1990, and he can be said to have been the architect behind Singapore’s impressive performance and continuous economic growth. The reasons for this growth are many, but his strategies to make use of technology with multinational corporations have helped the country achieve high-income status. To this day the PAP governs Singapore, driven by the pursuit of economic growth, and this is the PAP’s performance principle and main legitimacy to rule. The party will go to all lengths, including curtailing conventional democratic rights and practices, to “deliver the goods” to the people (Chua 2003). Certain laws and controls on political participation and civil rights, such as freedom of the press, suggest that Singapore is an illiberal democracy. Moreover, the “moral performance” of the PAP party-state defines its political rule and shapes the quality of social and political life (Yao 2007). Singapore’s judicial system has generally received high international acclaim, and this is also relevant to the way in which religion and religious affairs, including halal markets, are regulated and managed.

From the early 1980s the Singapore nation-building project moved towards a more “ethnic-cum-racial form,” with conceptions of “Chinese” ethnicity and a peculiar Singaporean notion of “Chinese values” playing increasingly important roles (Barr and Skrbis 2008). What is more, the ethnicization that took place included the upholding of Singapore’s two main national

myths, that is, multiracialism and meritocracy, that facilitate and legitimize rule by a self-appointed Chinese elite. The halal aspirations that emerged in the 1980s occurred in parallel with the promotion of a Confucian, and more broadly Chinese, ethics. The Confucian ethics in question include obedience to a benevolent and paternalistic hierarchical authority, and places great emphasis on societal duties and obligations. Ironically, it is this transformation that plays a key role in the proliferation of halal in Singapore and beyond.

The state promotion of halal in Singapore presents a paradox: halal as an ancient Muslim food taboo is promoted as a national and neutral brand that benefits the economy, while the moral implications are downplayed, especially in a Chinese-majority cultural context where Chinese social, religious, and economic rituals are unavoidably intertwined. Gambling, eating pork, and drinking alcohol are important ways of establishing identity and group membership, and daily rituals involving these “vices” permeate all aspects of Singaporean life (Stimpfl 2006). In this context, Malay Muslims are called upon to handle halal properly. In other words, no matter how forcefully halal is promoted as a highly lucrative global market in which countries such as Singapore want to find their rightful place, halal is essentially an Islamic moral injunction and not socially neutral in nature.

Before halal became part of a global and growing market, the state in Singapore considered it an expression of excessive religiosity and minority rights that separate Muslims and non-Muslims in a multiracial context. This is one explanation for Islam being so heavily regulated by the state in Singapore. The MUIS (*Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura*) is the main state Islamic institution and its main decision-making body is the council headed by a President. It also comprises the Mufti of Singapore and members nominated by Muslim organizations. The state attempts to take a pragmatic approach, promoting religiosity, even though Singapore is officially a secular state, while subjecting the “religious economy” to heavy regulation and strict governance structures (Pereira 2005). When the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) was enacted in 1965 it allowed for the establishment of the MUIS in 1968 and the consequent culmination of the fusion of Malay and Muslim identities in Singapore (Kadir 2004). The management of Islam in Singapore is done through the institutionalization of AMLA and the formation of the MUIS. Issues addressed in the AMLA are the Shariah Court; Muslim financial provisions; mosques and religious schools; halal and haj (pilgrimage); marriage and divorce; property; conversions; religious offences; and miscellaneous others. The MUIS’ functions, duties, responsibilities, and powers are clearly defined in the AMLA. It states that the MUIS was established and functions to administer matters relating to the Muslim religion and Muslims in Singapore, including any matter relating to halal certification. The MUIS started to provide halal services in 1972 and the first halal certificate was issued in 1978. The MUIS is solely responsible for this market and performs a regulatory function in halal under the state, facilitating halal food trade through certifying local exporters to export their products to a global halal market; certifying local establishments; and participating in forums on the standardization of halal certification (Riaz and Chaudry 2004).

An amendment of the AMLA was passed in 1999 giving the MUIS new powers, for instance allowing it to regulate, promote, and enhance the halal business. In December 2009 a further amendment of the AMLA with specific reference to halal certificates took effect, making it a serious offence to display false halal logos, that is, false MUIS logos. A number of requirements are related to audits and inspections specifically. Upon submission of the application and in the course of being halal certified, random audits and surprise inspections are performed on the applicant’s premises to ensure compliance with halal requirements. These audits verify the authenticity of information and supporting evidence submitted, and assess, among other things, the seriousness of intentions to go halal; the overall halal compliance and internal control

systems; the effectiveness and consistency of implementation; the role and efficacy of the Muslim staff in guiding and ensuring compliance in the production process; the understanding of halal requirements and compliance by employees; and the risk of non-compliance (Riaz and Chaudry 2004).

In a 2007 MUIS publication, the maintenance of a halal system is said to require the presence of mandatory Muslim staff, and a Halal Team is to be led by an appointed management representative and shall be comprised of at least one Muslim staff member and members from a multi-disciplinary background, who possess relevant knowledge, expertise, and MUIS training (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore 2007). These requirements are a source of controversy in halal production, trade, and regulation. Halal in the Singaporean context evolved from being a sensitive Malay minority question to becoming a major national focus of state and market. Singapore's "double minority" setting has been a driving force in the promotion of halal, where Malay Muslims are simultaneously seen as a "problem" as well as instrumental to the production, promotion, regulation, and consumption of halal. The stress on Chinese ethnicity, ethics, and values also embodies a powerful narrative about the hard-working and economically successful Chinese who must "tap" the global and expanding market for halal. All of this is taking place in the framework of Singapore's unique form of government, which can be characterized as illiberal or semi-authoritarian, and that allows for close networking between key organizations and institutions, as well as a standardized audit culture around the commoditization of halal. Ultimately, the MUIS as a statutory body plays a pivotal role in regulating the halal market in Singapore.

Teams and training

Malaysia

The Malaysian and Singaporean governments are increasingly and explicitly committed to playing an indirect supervisory role in halal, and the audit function is both a solution to a technical problem as well as a way of redesigning governance practices. Staff policies such as setting up a Halal Committee or team to handle halal properly as well as establishing sections in companies that specialize in halal compliance are examples of the increasingly prominent role of internal control systems that can be audited in Malaysia. Certification is essential in this respect as it ensures that halal complies with standards. Companies that wish to be halal certified by the Malaysian state can apply online and pay the required fee online as well. Applicants must declare that all ingredients are recognized by JAKIM or a certifier approved by JAKIM. In this process, ingredient specifications, supporting documents, company registration, and business permits from local authorities, as well as a flow chart for each product must be made available for officers to check. Officers do an "on site audit" and take note of any irregularities in the fields of documentation, processing, preparation, handling, hygiene, sanitation, storage, displaying, food safety, labelling, and layout of premises. The legal background is the Malaysian MS 1500 and MS 2200 as well as The Trade Descriptions Act of 1972 that stipulates the legal definition of halal. The mandatory internal Halal Committee, consisting of Muslims in the company, is responsible for providing auditors with required information.

In order to examine the role of Malaysian Halal Committees in companies, in 2010 I visited an industrial estate where a European multinational company that produces food ingredients, enzymes, and bio-based solutions is located. The company specializes in offering manufacturers new opportunities to meet growing consumer demand for halal-labelled products, and halal certification plays a key role in this. All of the company's raw materials comply with halal

requirements and thus the certification process is relatively uncomplicated. One representative of the Halal Committee has been working for the manufacturing company for 19 years. He is a chemistry graduate who was initially involved in production and then shifted to work on implementing system requirements on health and safety and International Standards Organization (ISO) standards on environmental management. The company he works for chose to focus on the Good Manufacturing Practices and Food Safety, which is internationally recognized, instead of the local Malaysian standard for halal MS 1500 (production, preparation, handling, and storage of halal food). The Halal Committee member I interviewed is responsible for managing halal compliance and certification, including application for and renewal of certificates with JAKIM. Encouraged by JAKIM, he has also undertaken training to enhance knowledge of halal technology and management. In his own words, he is the manufacturing plant's "halal manager." His colleague is a woman who has worked for the company for 13 years. She handles, among other things, JAKIM halal online registration and certification as well as quality control, product services, product specification, and customer requirements.

I learned that the company's Halal Committee is comprised of five Malays who are "appointed from executive level." JAKIM informs the company about training seminars and Halal Committee staff members do attend on occasion, but for the most they do not participate in JAKIM events. The focus in most of these seminars is on the process of application for halal certification and the company has more than 18 years of experience with this. The cost of certification has been stable over the years. One of the Halal Committee members is occasionally invited by JAKIM to discuss technical developments with regard to flavors and emulsifiers, for example. In this way JAKIM tries to keep up with industry innovation, and companies can discuss potential innovations with JAKIM before these are finally implemented in production. An important aspect to note is that company representatives and JAKIM officers not only exchange knowledge, but also develop rapport that helps facilitate cooperation.

During fieldwork conducted in 2010 in a food manufacturing company which is a joint venture between a European and a Malaysian company, it emerged that the company had first applied for JAKIM halal certification in 1995. At the time, there were no actual halal "standards," but merely localized halal classifications. JAKIM representatives simply inspected the premises to ensure that it was free of alcohol, raw materials were halal, and that hygiene in the form of toilets and washing facilities was in order. JAKIM inspectors wanted to know if the company was using any non-halal products, such as brushes made out of pigs' hair or alcohol. Moreover, inspectors wanted to know if any "harmful" chemicals were part of production. All that has changed and today halal is far more regulated and linked to the Malaysian MS 1500 standard and a whole range of management practices. These regulatory changes parallel those in the consumer market, driven by the behaviors and preferences of Malay consumers, and the General Manager and the Head of the Halal Committee tell me that this fastidiousness has made it impossible to sell any food product to Muslims in Malaysia that is not fully halal certified. Even for non-Muslims in Malaysia, halal has come to represent a form of wholesome, clean, and state-regulated consumption.

The company's products started carrying the JAKIM logo in 1998 and over the years the logo has changed a number of times. We can see different generations of designs of the company's label on their products and discern how the JAKIM halal logo has been redesigned. Today, as the company representatives explain, even the logo itself has to be deemed halal, meaning that products can only be halal if no haram glue is used for labels or packaging. The head of the Halal Committee learns about these requirements and many other types of new standards when he attends JAKIM training. One recent development is JAKIM's focus on halal logistics and transport. The company is ISO 9002 (Quality Management) certified and it is also complying

with food safety regulations set by the Malaysian Ministry of Health. When you have this kind of certification, JAKIM inspectors tend to be more “confident” in issuing halal certificates.

The company has formed the mandatory Halal Committee comprising at least two Muslim staff involved in the production process. Previously it was any Muslim member of staff, but now JAKIM insists that it has to be Muslim staff directly involved in the production process. Establishing the Halal Committee was not very resource demanding because about half of the company’s staff are Muslims. Regarding the cost of certification, JAKIM charges the company when renewing certificates. Previously, JAKIM wanted to charge companies for each product, but protests from the industry forced JAKIM to change this procedure, and now the certification process has been streamlined. Similarly, the General Manager and the Head of the Halal Committee recall that previously when imported raw materials were not formally halal certified and the mother company in Europe was not halal certified, this was a major challenge because of problems with customs clearance in Malaysia. The mother company in Europe is now certified by the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America that does inspections at the plant in Europe and is on JAKIM’s list of recognized certifying bodies. This factory is a good example of a food manufacturing company in which Muslim skills was essential for setting up the Halal Committee. From its relatively modest beginnings, being a religious injunction left to individualized interpretation or classification among Islamic bureaucrats and inspectors, halal is now centrally regulated by JAKIM and simpler to comply with. At the same time, JAKIM halal regulation is global in scope and constantly expands into food/non-food, as well as services.

Nestlé Malaysia, a company that exports its products to more than 50 countries worldwide with export sales of over one billion ringgit in 2011, was the first multinational to “voluntarily request” halal certification of all its food products in 1994 (Nestlé Malaysia 2016). Certification of Nestlé Malaysia products provides assurance that these are manufactured, imported, and distributed under the strictest hygienic and sanitary conditions in accordance with the Islamic faith. Moreover, products and premises for manufacturing have been inspected and have earned halal certification by recognized Islamic bodies. The halal logo on packaging testifies to the fact that products are prepared according to “stringent Islamic requirements” (Nestlé Malaysia 2016). The company set up its Halal Committee, comprising senior Muslim executives from various disciplines, to be responsible for all matters pertaining to halal certification and for training workers on complying with halal standards and auditing Nestlé factories worldwide. The company’s production is certified by JAKIM in Malaysia while other credible halal certification bodies certify products manufactured outside Malaysia. Part of my fieldwork in Malaysia in 2010 included a visit to Nestlé’s headquarters, which is located in a suburban setting about 15 km west of Kuala Lumpur. I discussed Nestlé’s involvement in halal with the committee chairman and staff who work in halal production. The chairman was educated in food science in Malaysia and joined the company in 2000. Since his appointment he has been sitting on the Halal Committee and he is currently involved in developing new halal chocolate products.

In the case of Nestlé Malaysia, its Halal Committee comprises 16 Muslim staff representing various departments in the company, including the factories and supply chains. Besides the fact that the Halal Committee has become a legal requirement, it predominantly acts as a focus for sharing halal knowledge and commitment to enhancing halal practices within the manufacturing sites. Nestlé developed its halal policy before other companies and before Halal Committees were mandatory, which gave the company a global advantage. Nestlé is a good example of a global company that has adapted to increasing halal requirements in Malaysia and that has taken these experiences to a global level. Since 1992, Nestlé has not only standardized

halal production through JAKIM certification, but the company has also itself been rationalized, systematized, and differentiated to adapt to modern halal production and regulation. In general, companies that rely on JAKIM certification in one way or the other try to live up to rising halal requirements. Within the last decade or so, JAKIM has become much more disciplined. It is clear that halal, as an Islamic injunction, influences the social organization of business (how companies understand and practice halal requirements), and all of these transformations come together in the setting up of Halal Committees and training programs.

Singapore

In 2009, I participated in a MUIS halal training event held at the MUIS Academy in Singapore that develops and conducts courses on Islam. The MUIS Academy “serves as a conduit for MUIS to share Singapore’s model of religious administration and service, expertise and technology” (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore n.d.). The objective of this training is to be able to understand the definition and basic concepts of halal certification, to be better prepared to comply with the MUIS halal requirements, and to gain an overview of the principles of the Singapore MUIS Halal Quality Management System (HalMQ). The course is mandatory for one Muslim member of staff and one other staff member in the Halal Team (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore 2007).

The MUIS Academy is a modern type of conference facility equipped with all the latest teaching equipment. It is part of a Singapore Islamic Hub (SIH) that comprises the Muhajirin Mosque, Madrasah Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiah (Islamic school), and the MUIS headquarters. Approximately 30 participants were in the Level 1 course that I was invited to attend. The basic structure of the training was a series of Microsoft PowerPoint slides narrated by a Malay teacher in English. The course is designed for Halal Team members, halal liaison officers, managers, and supervisors from companies and state institutions who are responsible for halal certification, as well as Muslim employees more generally. Halal regulation provides the framework for the course, while the training modules focus on developing proper halal skills among employees.

According to official MUIS publications, Halal Teams appoint personnel responsible for implementing, monitoring, and maintaining halal systems. A Halal Team is to be led by an appointed management representative and should comprise at least one Muslim staff and members from a “multi-disciplinary background, who possess relevant knowledge and expertise.” Companies must ensure that members of the Halal Team are sent for halal training that is recognized by MUIS. On the establishment of the Halal Team, MUIS requires that the management must ensure that the terms of reference of the Halal Team are fully established and the roles and responsibilities of each member are clearly defined. Members must be fully committed and responsible in developing, implementing, and maintaining an effective halal system. In terms of the General Halal Certification Requirements three areas are essential: halal basic requirements (documentation for raw materials), staffing (mandatory participation in halal courses for and establishing the Halal Team); and systems with particular reference to tightened legislation and complying with HalMQ principles. In all this, the teacher explains, logos and certificates are essential. A man asks if it would be possible to have mandatory and recognized certificates for imported raw materials and the teacher replies that this would be desirable, but unlike Singapore most countries do not have a state certification body like the MUIS that can issue reliable certificates. What is more, the teachers make clear that even if imported raw materials come with a logo, the certifier and thus the logo are not necessarily recognized by the MUIS. A man asks about the role of the Muslim staff or Halal Team. The

teacher reasons that the mandatory Muslim staff and Halal Team play an “advisory role” to give “public assurance.”

In general, the atmosphere is relaxed and many jokes blend in with the course contents. When presenting their poster, a group explains that when applying for halal certification the Muslim staff on the Halal Team should endorse incoming raw materials. The Halal Team’s Terms of Reference (TOR) is to satisfy such halal requirements and all members should have completed MUIS training. The teacher says that the exercise is there for participants to know what to do, for example to appoint a Halal Team leader. The group should remember that each Team member should have different roles and at least one Muslim staff member should be on the Halal Team in order to comply with HalMQ requirements. What is more, one man from the group emphasizes that the “halal file should be signed by Muslim staff.” The teacher stresses that if one Halal Team member fails, the whole team fails. A couple of questions concern the relationship between halal legislation and how companies should live up to this. Many questions relating to the particular situations of participants surface during the break, for example one question concerns the process of tightened legislation taking place in Singapore and how this relates to legislation and regulation of halal more globally. Another question focuses on sentencing in connection with different types of halal offences and how companies can ensure that they are not punished for using raw materials with fake halal logos.

During the coffee and lunch breaks, I had the opportunity to discuss halal with a sample of participants. The Director from the large Singaporean supermarket, NTUC Fairprice Co-operative LTD, explained that there is an increased focus on halal in Singapore, and thus the need for halal training has risen. The other representative from Fairprice present at the training is a Malay Muslim man who wondered why he, as a Muslim, had to take this course. The Director was handling Muslim complaints about frogs’ legs placed next to crabs and finds that translating halal into actual corporate practice in the supermarket has been resource demanding, but that rules and regulations are becoming clearer. Separating halal and non-halal products in supermarket outlets that are not designed for this, for example, poses a challenge. For a period of time, a “green mark” on the floor signified this separation, before halal and non-halal were separated in different sections of the supermarket. These are some of the issues that a company such as this one consults the MUIS on. Other aspects brought up during the break concern the role of law in halal in Singapore and more broadly the transformation halal is undergoing in the local setting and how this affects participants’ organizations.

When reflecting on these classroom experiences, it becomes clear that halal training plays an essential role in Malaysia and Singapore, especially in the context of changing landscapes of halal legality and regulation. The training structured around Microsoft PowerPoint slides pushes halal control and self-control into companies and state institutions, such as universities and hospitals, to satisfy the need to connect internal organizational arrangements to national visions and strategies. Most importantly perhaps, training instils or disciplines a form of common managerial model that emphasizes the encouragement of internal compliance systems. In other words, training technologies, and techniques discipline standardized halal understanding and practice in employees and institutions. Training is aimed at enhancing skills in terms of communication, teamwork, and leadership and it is in itself a form of skills-related product that offers workers advice or exhortation about acquiring, assessing, and enhancing their own skills.

Conclusion

The discussion of teams and training in Malaysia and Singapore in this chapter shows that identity and ethnicity are key aspects, that is, in both countries Muslim identity and ethnicity each

in their way help develop and brand a national halal market. Forms of regulation are comparable in Malaysia and Singapore, but there are also major differences. One of the main differences is that Malaysia is a leading global producer and exporter of halal products that can be found in shops around the world. Singapore is small in size; there are not many manufacturing industries in the country, and this fact limits global exports. Another reason for Malaysian dominance in halal globally is the political and institutional differences between the two countries. In Malaysia halal has been a major issue in the wake of *dakwah*, and it is inseparable from Malay privileges and rights ensured by the state and a host of Muslim-interest groups. The local market for halal consumption in Malaysia is vast and growing due to the buying power of large Malay middle-class groups.

Even if Malaysia is dominant in halal globally, halal in the Singaporean context evolved from being a sensitive Malay minority question to becoming a major national focus of state and market. Singapore's "double minority" setting has been a driving force in the promotion of halal, where Malay Muslims are simultaneously seen as a "problem" as well as possessing instrumental skills to the production, promotion, regulation, and consumption of halal. The stress on Chinese ethnicity, ethics, and values also embodies a powerful narrative about the hard-working and economically successful Chinese that must exploit the expanding global market for halal. All of this takes place in the framework of Singapore's unique form of government that can be characterized as a kind of authoritarianism that allows for close networking between key organizations and institutions. Consequently, this makes policy implementation and regulation of the halal market smoother than in neighboring Malaysia.

Halal production, trade, consumption, and regulation are evident in Malaysia and Singapore. As a discourse of power, halal legitimizes the existence of ethnicized markets in contexts where ethnicity and religion are often sensitive issues. This point is clear in the media in Malaysia and Singapore, where halal visions and strategies are ubiquitous. Sovereign rule in Malaysia and Singapore creates new economic possibilities, spaces, and technologies for regulating and marketing halal, such as an increased legal focus on halal. Certification is a service that companies must pay for, and as the production, trade, and regulation of halal took off and was standardized, a particular certification economy emerged. Third-party certification is essential to companies, and these have allocated resources to not only pay for certification per se, but also to establish Halal Committees and teams consisting of Muslims.

Halal in Malaysia and Singapore is inseparable from the way in which Islam and religion more generally are regulated by the state. In Malaysia, the state nationalized Islam and halal fearing the implications of the resurgence of Islam. Thus, state institutions gradually developed the vision of becoming the world leader in halal production, trade, and regulation. In Singapore, *halal* evolved from being a sensitive Malay minority question to becoming a major national focus of both state and market. In Singapore, Malay Muslims are simultaneously seen as a problem as well as instrumental to the production, promotion, regulation, and consumption of *halal* in the region and vis-à-vis Malaysia in particular. As previously indicated, hard-working and economically successful Chinese feel compelled to capture a growing share of the global market for halal, while assisted by "instrumental Malays," thus reproducing a politics of ethnic hierarchy.

Note

- 1 This is a revised version of the chapter *Talent, Teams and Training: Managing Muslim Markets in Malaysia and Singapore* that appeared in Adam Tyson's edited volume *The Political Economy of Brain Drain and Talent Capture* (Routledge 2019). I am grateful for Routledge giving me permission to use this material.

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PART III

Muslim spatialities



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SOUTH ASIAN SHI'Ī SACRED GEOGRAPHY

Tracing 'Ali's footprints

Karen G. Ruffle

Introduction

For more than a millennium, the Indian subcontinent has been home to Muslims and others who have expressed fidelity to the 12 Imams and the family of the Prophet Muhammad, known as the Ahl-e Bait (“the people of the House”), which I describe as ‘Alid devotion (Bernheimer 2013: 3–4). In his *Kashf al-mahjūb* (The unveiling of secrets), the first treatise on Sufi thought written in Persian, Sayyid ‘Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 464/1071–1072) described ‘Ali – first Imam and Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law – as the intellectual founder and the paragon of idealized Sufi praxis:

He is the Imam of this Spiritual Path as regards both knowledge (*ilm*; i.e., theory) and practice (*mu‘amala*) – may God be content with him. The reason for this is that adepts of this way call the intellectual theory (*ilm*) of this Path its “principles”, while its practice consists entirely of the endurance of affliction.

Lewisohn 2006: 114

Figures such as al-Hujwiri, writing as early as the eleventh century in Lahore, at the eastern edge of the *dār al-Islām* (“the abode of Islam,” where Islam is the majoritarian religion and the *sharī‘ah* is implemented as law), theorized a form of Sufi spirituality animated by ‘Alid devotion that bridged the intellectual and the experiential, which was pivotal for transforming the Indian subcontinent into a sacred Shi‘ī land, in which Karbala is translocated through ritual and material practices, where figures like ‘Abbas, ‘Ali, and Zainab, embedded in the cultural memories of generations of women and men, came to exemplify the religious ideals and to embody the cultural, social, and ethical values of their devotees.

I begin this chapter with al-Hujwiri’s creative synthesis of ‘Ali as the confluence of Sufi praxis and intellectual thought. Although he was writing from the putative edge of the Islamic world, ‘Alid devotion both in thought and practice was foundational in shaping the diverse sacred spaces, and ritual and material practices of South Asian Shi‘ism. For many Shi‘a who settled in the Indian subcontinent, the shrine-tombs of the Imams and Ahl-e Bait in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Hejaz were geographically and culturally distant and *ziyārah*, the ritualized “visitation” (conventionally glossed as “pilgrimage”) to their graves, was impossible for most,

even the elite. Local Shi'i communities integrated cultural memory of Karbala and love for the Imams and Ahl-e Bait to create new expressions of "Indo-Shi'ism," blending aspects of Indic and Shi'i religious sensibilities. Shi'i cultural memory is intrinsically translocative, blurring the boundaries between Karbala-Najaf and India, through the proliferation of foot- and handprints (*qadam*- and *panjah-sharīf*) of the Imams and the Prophet Muhammad (*qadam-rasūl*), and the translocation of Karbala to India by distributing soil from area around Husain's shrine-tomb for pilgrimage and for the reward of Paradise to be buried "near" the Imam (Ruffle 2021: 291–292).

This chapter focuses on the footprints (*qadam*) of two paradigmatic figures in South Asian Shi'ism, the first Imam, 'Ali and the Prophet Muhammad. South Asia was explicitly *territorialized* as a sacred Shi'i land through the miraculous manifestation of the footprints of 'Ali and Muhammad, which I will refer to in this essay as "Alid footprints." Footprint relics of 'Ali (*qadam-sharīf*) and Muhammad (*qadam-rasūl*) also conform to what I have elsewhere called a "reliquary script" to describe the process by which "Shi'i relics are simultaneously 'discovered' and 'recovered' by pious individuals who have been chosen by the Imams and Ahl-e Bait" (2021: 189). The manifestation of these footprints are local and are legible to adherents of multiple faith communities – Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Christian – because they tap into a store of subcontinental themes common to these groups that "live within the same spiritual economy where similar categories, concepts, and tropes have similar currency" (Bellamy 2006: 208). The localized territorialization of 'Alid footprints is authorized through its prophetic genealogy, which is expressed in two forms. First, through the normative prophetic history in which Muhammad was the seal of the prophets (*khatm al-nabiyyin*) and 'Ali was designated to "follow in his footsteps" as his religio-political successor through the doctrine of the Imamate. Second, the footprint enacts prophetic genealogy in South Asia as an *āthār*, the Arabic word for trace, which conventionally refers to relics such as the *qadam-sharīf*.

In this chapter, the Shi'i sacred landscape of South Asia is typologically mapped through two sacred footprint shrines (*dargāh qadam-sharīf*) dedicated to 'Ali in Hyderabad and New Delhi, India, and dated to the sixteenth century.¹ The case studies of the *qadam-sharīf* at the Dargah Shah-e Mardan in New Delhi and the *panjah-sharīf* (handprint) shrine of Moula 'Ali in Hyderabad trace links between space, narrative, and formation of ritual. In her study of the relics related to the Prophet Muhammad, Imams, and Ahl-e Bait displayed in the museum at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Sachiko Komaki asserts that Islam "is basically de-territorial in nature [which] tends to be at variance with the principle of modern nation-states, which are by nature 'territorial states'" (2004: 106). The translocativity of 'Alid footprints and the role they have in "planting [a Shi'i] sacred history in the soil of India" asserts instead the territorial quality of Islam (Green 2012: 121).

From Adam to 'Ali: Imprinting Shi'i sacred geography in South Asia

In the estimation of Ghulam 'Ali "Azad" Bilgrami (d. 1786, Daulatabad), the prolific seventeenth-century Indian Muslim belletrist, the descent of Adam to earth was an act of beauty and inherent goodness (on Adam's footprint in Sri Lanka, see also the contributions to this volume by Tschacher and Xavier). Bilgrami declares in his 1764 treatise on the indigeneity of Islam as an Indian religion, *Subḥat al-marjān fī āthār Hindūstān* (The coral rosary of Indian antiquities):

Yes, if Adam had not descended there [Serendip, or Sri Lanka], who would have brought beauty to this desolation through civilization... It is not secret that the children of Adam are all Indians, because their father Adam was an Indian.

Ernst 1995: 563

Moreover, it is to Mount Dujna in India – hypothesized by the ninth-century Persian qur'anic exegetes Ibn Abi Hatim and Ibn Jarir to refer to Dakshina (south), or the region of the Deccan – that Adam always returned to India, even after performing pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), where he also visited his wife Eve. In Part I of *The Coral Rosary*, “The Ambergris Fragrance,” Bilgrami outlines a remarkable theory of Islam as an Indian religion. Moreover, Bilgrami does not see India and Arabia as foreign to one another, but rather as sites of primordial contact and genealogical descent linked by the horizontal axis of the Indian Ocean and the vertical axes of Adam's Peak and Dujna in Southern Asia and the Ka'ba in Arabia. Bilgrami's view of Islam and the Muslim world is distinctly *wholistic*; his view of the world was far more expansive in the eighteenth century than we see today.

In extolling India as a sacred Islamic land, Bilgrami emphasizes Adam's descent to Sarandib in India. Bilgrami writes,

The Master 'Ali al-Rūmī said in his *Discourses*: ‘On the footprint is a luminosity that dazzles the eyes, which none can endure to see. The length of his footprint in the rock is seventy spans, and on the mountain there is a light like dazzling lightning. There is no doubt that it rains there every day and washes his footprint. From this mountain, Adam traveled to the seacoast in a single step, though it is a journey of two days’.

Ernst 1995: 560–561

Although uncommented on by Bilgrami, this quote from Rūmī's *Discourses* is exceptionally rich. Adam's footprint is imbued with a dazzling light indicating not only its exalted status, the light that radiates from the relic reveals that “India is the place of the dawning of the Muḥammadan light [*nūr muḥammadī*], and the origin of this eternal effusion” (Ernst 1995: 561). As the first of God's human creations to walk the earth (with his wife Hawwa, who descended to Jiddah in the Hejaz in Arabia), as attested by Bilgrami, Adam was a prophet of giant stature, whose footprint on the mountaintop of Sarandib left a massive impression, and even with the reduction of his height from 60 to 30 cubits when he was expelled from the garden, he was able to crisscross the earth in mere steps. According to Brannon Wheeler, Adam and Eve's tombs in Arabia are the longest, “followed by those of the antediluvian and Arab prophets, and then by the tombs of later prophets and the *nau-gaz* tombs of the *ghazis* and saints” (2006: 117). Wheeler argues that “tomb architecture and size results not from the physical requirements of the corpse but rather from the attempt to express the historical and social significance of the interred person” (2006: 119). What does the size of Adam's tomb have to do with the footprint relic on Adam's Peak in current-day Sri Lanka, or the proliferation of Shi'i footprints (*qadam-sharīf*) that map a sacred geography in contemporary India and Pakistan?

Shi'i materiality, including the foot- and handprints that I focus on in this chapter, are translocative, collapsing time and space between geographically and historically distant sites in Arabia and Iraq where the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, and the Ahl-e Bait lived and died (Ruffle 2021: 7). The 'Alid footprints that map a Shi'i sacred geography in South Asia affirm the prophetic genealogy initiated by Adam when he descended on Mount Dujna in Sarandib, leaving a massive footprint that shone with a light that blazed like dazzling lightning, beginning the progression of *nūr muḥammadī* until it culminated with the seal of the prophets, Muhammad. 'Ali restored this light (*nūr*) to India through the light of the Imamate, which is manifested through his miraculous foot- and handprints, where healing and other intercessory acts are performed.

Dargah Shah-e Mardan, New Delhi

Often overlooked in the sacred geography of footprints and handprints associated with members of the *panjetan-e pāk*, “the five pure ones” (the Prophet Muhammad, Fatimah al-Zahra, ‘Ali, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husain), Delhi claims relics associated with these figures that date as early as the fourteenth century. The Dargah Qadam-e Rasul is located in Paharganj in New Delhi and it is thought that the footprint of the Prophet Muhammad (*qadam-rasūl*) was brought to India on the orders of sultan Firoz Shah (r. 1351–1388) who had the relic placed over the grave of his son Fath Khan (d. 1374). The *qadam-rasūl* is one of the earliest relics we can trace arriving in the subcontinent. According to the nineteenth-century Urdu-language history of Delhi *Āṣār al-ṣanādīd* (Monuments of great men), authored by the Muslim thinker Sayyid Ahmad Khan,

It is said that as a result of some miracle, footprints of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad were permanently made in stone slabs and one of them bearing a footprint of the Prophet was brought to India... A tank with marble screen around it has been built near it. The footprint of the Prophet is washed by its water which is collected and taken away by the visitors.

Khan quoted in Welch 1997: 167

A second relic associated with the *panjetan-e pāk* and housed in the Dargah Shah-e Mardan complex, which I discuss below, is the *bībī kī chakkī*, or Fatimah’s grinding stone. It is not clear how the relic came to be installed in the Shah-e Mardan complex. The relic is kept in a building called the Bibi ka Rauza, which is constructed of masonry and topped with a dome. Initially, the relic associated with Fatimah was a cup, although, sometime in the twentieth century, the object underwent a transformation, which is well documented by Khaliq Anjum in his Urdu-language history of the *dargah* complex (1988: 87). Nalini Singh notes that during renovation work that was being undertaken at the Shah-e Mardan complex, the cup relic sustained damage and somehow became flattened. Shrine authorities covered over the damaged cup with a large rock to protect it from further harm, causing it to take on the appearance of a *chakkī*, or circular grinding stone (2006: 284–285). The less than miraculous conversion of the relic seemed not to generate controversy, perhaps because the transformation more closely aligned the object with Shi’i cultural memory of Fatimah grinding corn at her *chakkī* until her fingers bled – a popular story in the South Asian hagiographical imaginary. The *chakkī* relic certainly resonates for many women who spend many hours each day engaged in labor-intensive domestic tasks. They emotionally connect with Fatimah’s own labors and suffering, and they identify with Fatimah as wife, mother, Muslim, and homemaker through entering into Fatimah’s presence in the relic through acts of auspicious gazing, and by seeking her intercession through supplicatory vows and offerings (see Ruffle 2015; in this volume, Graves also discusses Mai Misra’s jar and its ritual installation in Ahmedabad).

Like the cup relic associated with Fatimah al-Zahra, the origins of the footprint relic are somewhat uncertain. In the nineteenth century, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, writing in *Āṣār al-ṣanādīd*, makes two errors with regard to the *qadam* relic. First, Khan incorrectly reads the date of the inscription on the northern edge of the tank as 1137 AH although the correct date is in fact 1173 AH/1759 CE (Khan 2007: 87). Second, and more importantly, Khan assumes this inscription, which reads, “On the ground where there is the sign of the footprint/ For years to come, there will be the prostrations of the men of insight [1173 AH]” (Khan 2007: 87), refers to the arrival of the relic in Delhi. As Zafar Hasan observed in *List*

of *Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* in 1919, on both counts, Khan is incorrect in his presumptions (Hasan 1919: 200). Popular tradition credits much of the construction of the shrine's buildings, and more significantly, the acquisition of the *qadam-sharīf* with Qudsiya Begum (d. 1754), the wife of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah Rangila (r. 1748–1754). Qudsiya Begum is known for her deep love for the Imams and Ahl-e Bait which she expressed through patronage of Muharram ritual and construction of religious architecture including *imāmbārās* and mosques. Several buildings in the Shah-e Mardan complex were commissioned by Qudsiya Begum, however, the relic was present at the site at least two centuries before she lived.

Contrary to Sayyid Ahmad Khan's theory that the *qadam* relic was installed around 1724 (1137 AH), there is evidence that the Shah-e Mardan complex dates back to 1543–1544 in the reign of Sher Shah (r. 1540–1545) of the Sur dynasty. As early as the sixteenth century, a portion of the Shah-e Mardan complex was being used as a cemetery, most likely for Shi'a. According to the historian Rana Safvi, the relic made its miraculous appearance in Delhi:

In the 15th or 16th century (no exact dates are available for this) a Shia man Arif Shah was running from persecution. He was followed by the army. Tired from running he stopped to rest in Aliganj on the exact spot that his *dargah* is made and started invoking Ali.

Ya Ali madad [O, 'Ali help!].

Very soon he saw a gentleman who put his hand on his head and kept pressing it down till he became as small as a 2 year old child. The army very soon caught up with him but to their surprise they saw only a small child and they moved on. Arif Shah soon came back to his normal size and saw that the spot on which his savior Maula Ali had stood was a footmark. The *dargah* of Hazrat Arif Shah was built on this place. His 'urs is in the month of Sawan [Shravan].

Dargah Shah e Mardan n.d., cited in Safvi 2020

This account explains how the *qadam* that appeared in Aliganj operates within a hagiographic discursive domain. In his moment of tribulation, Arif Shah stopped on the ground that would become "Aliganj," referring to the marketplace or bazaar that developed around the shrine complex that came to be built to house the *qadam-sharīf*, Fatimah's cup, and attached *karbalā* grounds for burial of pious Shi'a and *tā'ziyas* (likeness of Imam Husain's Karbala shrine-tomb) on ten Muharram (*āshūrā*) that releases Imam Husain's body from its "tomb" in a process of ritual cooling (*thanḍā karnā*) until it returns the following year. In his moment of near-martyrdom, Arif Shah focused his concentration on 'Ali, calling out, "ya 'Ali madad," "O, 'Ali, help!" As *shāh-e mardān*, the "king of men," 'Ali possesses powerful intercessory and protective powers over those who focus their minds on him.

Shāh-e-mardān, sher-e-yazdān,

King of men, the Lion of God

Quwwat-e-parvardagār,

The might of the Lord

Lā fatā illā 'Alī, lā saif illā Zu'l-fiqār,

There is no victory without Ali; there is no sword like Zulfiqar

Dum hama dum 'Alī 'Alī, Dum hama dum 'Alī 'Alī...

In rapture, my very being cries out: 'Ali 'Ali

Khan 1999

Imam ‘Ali’s presence is also manifested in the Shah-e Mardan complex in Aliganj in New Delhi. Although the lines of this famous *qawwālī*, “Dum hama dum ‘Ali, ‘Ali,” most famously sung by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (d. 1997) are not inscribed anywhere within the shrine precincts, its words not only reflect the feelings Shi’a hold for the Imam, but also point to the tenacity of the site to exist through the violence of the Partition and an environment where religious boundaries are drawn along increasingly polarized lines that I discuss below (Menon 2017: 26–28). The *qawwālī* references ‘Ali’s heroic conduct at the protracted battle of Khaybar in 628. The Prophet sought ‘Ali’s help to conquer the heavily fortified al-Qamus fort. ‘Ali fought ferociously, ultimately breaking his shield, and he tore the heavy door from the fort, which he flung down to allow the Muslim soldiers to gain entry and attain victory. So strong is ‘Ali that he was able to replace the heavy door on its hinges singlehanded. This *qawwālī* calls ‘Ali the “lion of God” (*sher-e khudā*), a popular and endearing title for the Imam in South Asia, and he is the embodiment of chivalry and generosity (*futūnwah*). “There is no victory without Ali; there is no sword like Zulfiqar” links together the Imam as a heroic, chivalric figure with his sword that is endowed with the same virtues while also being tinged with messianic and magical qualities (Ruffle 2021: 180).

Returning to the Shah-e Mardan complex and the *qadam-sharīf*, we know for certain that by the first half of the seventeenth century, burial at Shah-e Mardan was aspirational for pious Shi’a. Mahabbat Khan Khan-e Khanan, the high-ranking general in the Mughal emperor Jahangir’s army died in 1634 while posted in the Deccan. He stated in his will that he wanted to be buried within the sacred grounds of the *qadam-sharīf* of Shah-e Mardan, bridging the distance between Najaf and the subcontinent (Hasan 1919: 198–199).

The shrine where the *qadam* is housed is constructed of white marble (*sang-marmar*). In the middle of the enclosure sits a tank also made of white marble in which the *qadam-sharīf* of Imam ‘Ali is imprinted on a brownish stone. The *qadam-sharīf* is 1’ 1” × 7 ½” and has had numerous “lives” in the Shah-e Mardan complex. Initially the relic was set in the bottom of a marble tank set in the middle of a marble platform 2.5-feet high that was open to the sky. The pure water that filled the tank (*hauz*) was charged with ‘Ali’s *baraka* that devotees sought out for its curative properties, as noted in the eighteenth century by the Deccani nobleman Dargah Quli Khan in *Muraqqā‘-e Delhi*: “The dust of his [Hazrat Ali] threshold is cure for the ailing and the sweet water of the spring fulfils the desires of the needy and they tie threads to seek favours [which are duly fulfilled]” (Khan 1989: 4, cited in Singh 2006: 283).

During the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the majority of the Shi’a in Aliganj migrated across the border leaving behind their beloved relic. The Shah-e Mardan complex was not safe from harm in the communal violence incited by the Partition. The dargah structure and the tank holding the *qadam* sustained damage and during the “long” Partition, in which the governments of India and Pakistan worked to patriate new citizens, non-Muslims were settled in Aliganj in abandoned houses and on *waqf* land (Shareef n.d.). During this period, the shrine complex and surrounded areas were heavily encroached upon by newly arriving refugees. In order to protect the relic, it was taken to the Dargah Panjah Sharif at Kashmiri Gate in Old Delhi, where it remained in safe keeping for a period of time. The white marble tank constructed by Qudsiya Begum was destroyed when the *qadam* was shifted.

When conditions proved more hospitable, the *qadam* was returned to Shah-e Mardan where Mr. Waqar Abbas Rizvi commissioned the construction of a black marble tank (Shareef n.d.). The curative powers of this water continued in the second “life” of the relic on its installation in the black marble *hauz*. When a devotee makes a vow (*mannat*), an offering (*naṣr*) of milk is presented to Imam ‘Ali, which is distributed as *tabarruk*, or blessed food. Making vows and offerings to the relic is so popular with devotees that,

due to this practice and kissing the stone to exhibit the love and reverence to Maula Ali (as), by large number of devotees, the stone started losing the mark of the foot of Maula Ali (as) that is why the tank is now covered with a thick tempered glass. 'Nazr' is still offered.

Shareef n.d.

Koh-e Moula 'Ali, Hyderabad

Further south in the Deccan region, Imam 'Ali's presence manifested in sixteenth-century Hyderabad on at least two occasions. The handprints miraculously revealed themselves to pious Muslims several decades before the new-built city of "Hyderabad" (the city of Haidar, an epithet of 'Ali) was established in 1591 by the fifth Qutb Shahi sultan, Muhammad Quli (r. 1580–1612). The appearance of the 'Alid *panjah-sharīf* authorized the Qutb Shahi dynasty, solidifying the symbolic link between the royal status of the Imams and the Shi'i sultans. The form of the *panjah* has a secondary authorizing function because of its auspicious, protective significations. In its representational form, the hand-shaped *panjah* with its right palm facing outward resembles the Indic *abhaya mudrā* gesture, which is legible across Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions, and its auspicious protectiveness calls to mind 'Ali and his son 'Abbas who was martyred collecting water at the Euphrates River during the battle of Karbala. Furthermore, the footprints are talismanic, protecting sultan and citizens from harm. The discovery of a miraculous spring of water atop a rocky outcrop called the Koh-e Tur in the seventeenth century was attributed to Fatimah al-Zahra and became an important source for healing and intercession. While the Bibi ka Chashmah and *qadam-sharīfs* may seem unconnected, I contend that a "wide-angle" approach allows us to see patterns in the formation of South Asian Shi'i sacred geography that links together 'Ali and Fatimah through certain types of ritual and material practices that are mediated through space and the sensorium (see Ruffle 2021; Ruffle 2020; Ruffle 2017).

Imam 'Ali's right handprint (*panjah-sharīf*) is a self-manifesting relic located in Malkajgiri, a suburb of Hyderabad, India. Known as Koh-e Moula 'Ali, the relic is located at the top of a mammoth boulder outcrop, which is reached by climbing a series of shallow steps carved in the granite. Similarly, Panjagutta, the fashionable and traffic-clogged shopping center located in Hyderabad's city center, is named for another rocky hillock where it is believed that 'Ali left an impression of his right hand (*panjah*) and knee (*ghuṭnā*). The Panjagutta hand and knee impressions likewise date from the Qutb Shahi period (r. 1496–1687), although historical information is scanty. Today, Hyderabadis popularly refer to the Panjagutta '*āshūrkhānah* (special buildings where mourning assemblies take place and metal standards, '*alams*, are displayed during Muharram) as "Choṭā" (little) Moula 'Ali. According to the story connected to the '*āshūrkhānah* and its relic, one night while a general in the Qutb Shahi army slept, Imam 'Ali appeared to him in a dream prostrating in prayer. The general located the rocky hilltop and there saw the clear imprint of 'Ali's right hand and his knee firmly pressed into the granite. The *panjah* and *ghuṭnā* impressed into the rock, while considerably larger than those of the average man, are much smaller than the massive hand- and footprints usually associated with the Imams in South Asia. These are not the only manifestations of imprints of 'Ali's physical form to come to Hyderabad during the reign of the Qutb Shahi sultans.² Their very proliferation speaks to the power of dreams in helping such gifts of the Imams and Ahl-e Bait manifest themselves, and on their role as gifts in conferring legitimacy to Shi'i kings, whether the Qutb Shahs of Golconda-Hyderabad, the Awadh Nawabs of Lucknow (r. 1722–1856), or the Talpar Mirs of Hyderabad, Sindh (r. 1783–1843).

In *Gulzār-e Āṣafiyya*, a history of the Sunni Asaf Jahi Nizams who ruled the princely state of Hyderabad from 1724–1948, Ghulam Husain Khan (1999: 551–552) narrates in detail how Yaqut, a eunuch employed in the court of the fourth Qutb Shahi sultan, Ibrahim (r. 1550–1580), discovered Imam ‘Ali’s handprint on a boulder outcrop on the outskirts of what was to become the new-built city of Hyderabad (est. 1591). A spiritual man, it was Yaqut’s habit to spend Thursday nights in spiritual retreat in Malkajgiri, the current name of the sixteenth-century village Malik Arjuna Giri (Kugle 2010: 140) to get away from the politics and intrigue of Golconda. Late in the night of the sixteenth of the blessed month of Rajab,³ and passing into the early morning hours, Yaqut dreamed he saw an Arab man dressed in green clothing who told him that ‘Ali was summoning him. Yaqut climbed the hill and saw Imam ‘Ali sitting before him. The next morning Yaqut again climbed the hill and there in the rock the Imam’s right palm was clearly impressed, proving the veracity of his blessed nocturnal experience. Yaqut had the *panjah* cut out from the rock. Yaqut then returned to Golconda and informed Sultan Ibrahim of his miraculous discovery and he became the patron of the relic and had a shrine built in 1578 for its display.

The Moula ‘Ali complex is made up of numerous archways, courtyards, tombs, mosques, and gardens, in addition to the ‘*āshūrkhānah* located at the summit (Figure 13.1). The complex was constructed in two phases during the reigns of the Qutb Shahs and succeeding Asaf Jahi Nizams, who although Sunni, were enthusiastic patrons and revivalists of Shi‘i religious institutions and Muharram ritual. At the ‘*āshūrkhānah*, where the *panjah-sharīf* is concealed behind a curtain for most of the year the relic, is displayed each year during the week-long

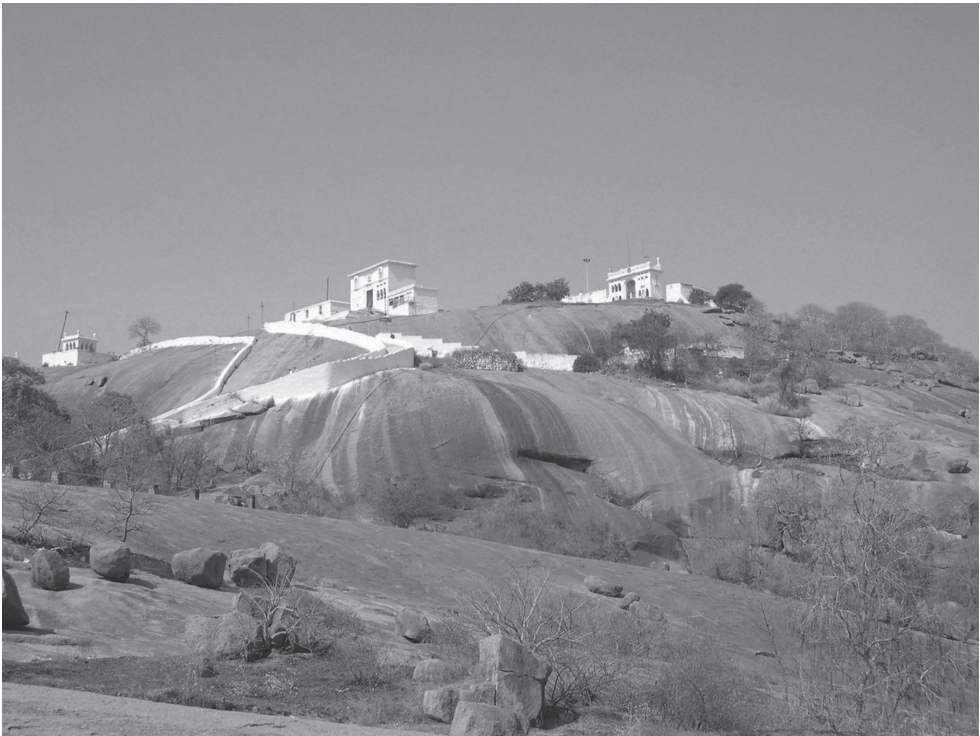


Figure 13.1 Koh-e Moula ‘Ali, Hyderabad. Photo by Karen G. Ruffle.



Figure 13.2 Banner celebrating 'Ali's birthday, Hyderabad. Photo by Karen G. Ruffle, 2013.

celebration of 'Ali's birthday known as *jashn-e moulūd-e Ka'ba*, which commemorates his birth in the Ka'ba on 13 Rajab in 599 C.E. On 1 Rajab a camel makes its way through the predominantly Shi'i neighborhoods of Hyderabad's Old City, on which a rider beating a royal drum (*naqqārah*) joyfully cries out the news, "māh-e Rajab ā gayā," the month of Rajab has come! In Dar al-Shifa', one of the Old City's central Shi'i neighborhoods, a grand festival is organized lasting several evenings. Buildings are illuminated with colored lights, banners (see Figure 13.2), stalls selling delicacies and trinkets line the streets, and boys set off deafening crackers in celebration. From 16 Rajab or so, 13 sandal processions⁴ depart from different parts of Hyderabad to converge on Moula 'Ali, where Shi'a present their offerings, make vows and requests, and engage in an act of auspicious visual exchange that brings Imam 'Ali close and present.

The impressions made in stone of hands and feet of Imam 'Ali and the Prophet Muhammad during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked a sacred boundary around the Qutb Shahi capital, serving as an apotropaic threshold, protecting sultan and citizen from enemies and illness. As such, these impressions were the consummate signs of auspicious and benevolent protection worthy of adornment and the construction of memorial structures (*āshūrkhānahs*) through which to experience their intercessory power and sacred presence.

The immersion of the *qadam* participates in what I call an Indo-Shi'i spiritual economy in which water serves as an efficient and powerful conduit for the *baraka* of the Imams and Ahl-e Bait. The immersion of 'Alid footprint relics operate in a continuum with Muharram processions of *tā'ziyas* and *'alams* (metal crests representing the Imams and Ahl-e Bait), and *karbalā* burial grounds are sites where the *baraka* of the Imams and Ahl-e is sensorially transferred. In nineteenth-century Hyderabad on 10 Muharram, at the conclusion of the *'āshūrā*

julūs (procession) that made its way through the Old City to the banks of the Musi River, the ‘*alams* would be stripped of the

dhuttee [brocaded cloth], flowers, ornaments, etc., which they put into *puttaras* [rattan boxes], dip them naked in the water two or three times, and wash them. Men and boys, Hindoos as well as Moosulmans, eagerly run into the water after them, and catch the drops of water as they fall; and conceiving it good (possessed of peculiar virtue), drink it, and apply it to their eyes.”

Shurreef [1863] 1991: 146

Water as a medium of *baraka* of some types of ‘Alid reliquary traces in South Asia maps onto both a subcontinental spiritual economy of bathing in and drinking from sacred water sources for healing and intercession from saints, gods, and goddesses. Water as a conduit of *baraka* likewise finds precedent in Islamic normative tradition, with water of the Zamzam well believed by Muslims since the early period to be charged with blessedness and to have curative qualities (Chabbi 2012). Michael Knight catalogues the *sīra/maghāzī* and early *ḥadīth* reports of the Prophet Muhammad producing prodigious amounts of water from his fingers, enough “for not only 30,000 people but also for their 10,000 horses and 12,000 or 15,000 camels” (2020: 73). The Prophet’s *baraka* extends to his family, the Imams and the Ahl-e Bait.

Located near the Falak Numa palace in Hyderabad, the Bibi ka Chashmah is a healing spring whose miraculous manifestation out of an impenetrable rocky outcrop is attributed to Fatimah al-Zahra. I include a description of the shrine and the healing rituals that regularly take place because of the importance of water as a conduit of *baraka* for healing and intercession. While the shrine does not contain a physical relic of Fatimah’s body, such a reliquary form would constitute a violation of ‘*izzat*, that is the honor related to maintaining the dignity, social rank, and reputation of the family that is intricately connected to women’s behavior, which in this instance would be connected to the physical disclosure of her body.

This sacred place located near the Falak Numa palace at Mount Tur in Hyderabad was established by Hayat Bakhshi Begum, the daughter of the fifth Qutb Shahi sultan, Muhammad Quli [r. 1580–1612], and wife of sultan Muhammad [r. 1612–1626], who established the *bībī kā ‘alam*, and commissioned the construction of the *masjid* in Hayat Nagar and the Ma Sahibah Tank (*tālāb*).⁵ The blessed spring that was discovered here was named after the Mistress of Two Worlds (S.A.). Opposite the spring is a small compound with a spacious hall (*dālān*) and courtyard (*ṣaḥn*). The sick, those afflicted with demonic possession (*āseb-zadah*), and infertile (*bānjh*) women all consume the spring’s water, which has a curative effect (*tiryāq kā kām kartā hai*). From the Qutb Shahi period until today, countless men, particularly together with women obtain benefit. After making their vows, those afflicted with demonic possession mix some of the spring water with other pure water and perform full ablution (*ghusl*). Until Wednesday or Thursday, this ritual is performed, and the demon will then be exorcised.

Infertile women drink the spring water and then do the ritual ablution (*wuḥū*), after which they make the following supplicatory vow, “Almighty God, by the intercession of the Lady of Paradise, may I be honored by the conception of a child!” When sick, crippled (*apāḥaṭ*) and paralytic (*zamīn-gīr*) people perform full ablution (*ghusl*) in this blessed water, God fully heals them.

On 13 Jumadi al-Awwal and 20 Jumadi al-Thani, a mourning assembly (*majlis-e 'azā*) commemorating the martyrdom and a celebration (*jashn*) of the birthday (*wilādat bā sā'ādat*) of Fatimah is held in which thousands of men (*mu'minīn*) and women (*mu'mināt*) gather. Throughout the year, pious men and even more women perform pilgrimage (*ziyārah*) and mourning assemblies are organized.

(translated from Hyder 1978: 94–95)

Often overlooked is the linking together of Shi'i relic sites that are devoted to 'Ali and to Fatimah where practices of healing and intercession take place. As the site of both 'Ali's footprint (*qadam-sharīf*) and Fatimah's *chakkī*, the Shah-e Mardan complex exudes *baraka* and the relics and the visual and votive practices associated with them (Ruffle 2021) establish intense emotional yet asymmetrical relationships with these saintly figures. In Hyderabad – “the city of Haidar-‘Ali” – relics and miraculous sites, particularly water springs and footprint manifestations, map a Shi'i sacred geography of the city. Rituals associated with these sites and image-objects associated with these figures symbolically invest 'Ali and Fatimah as Shi'i royalty legitimated through the doctrine of the Imamate and direct genealogical descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

Conclusion

In her fieldwork on healing practices at the Husain Tekri shrine in Madhya Pradesh, Carla Bellamy presents an account of a wellspring attributed to a miraculous manifestation by Imam 'Ali sometime in the twentieth century (Bellamy 2011: 45). According to the story in circulation at Husain Tekri, 'Ali appeared at the shrines of Husain and 'Abbas because of some acts of disrespect that happened. Bellamy writes,

Either individuals (sometimes explicitly marked as Arabs or Saudis) express doubt about the power of the saints and their shrines, or they enter the shrines in a ritually impure state or without removing their shoes. In response to this, 'Ali appears, mounted on his horse and bearing a whip that he uses to punish the disrespectful... one pilgrim explained that when the doubter was whipped he lost consciousness; upon regaining consciousness, he had a handful of the soil of Karbala in his hand and a scar that never faded on his back.

Bellamy 2011: 45

A few points stand out about this account. First, 'Ali is presented as a wrathful (*ugra*) or fierce figure rather than as a gentle, benevolent healer. Second, the translocative quality of Karbala is evinced in this story through the man's whipping; he holds a handful of its soil in his hand when he regains consciousness and the scar on his back will not fade as a reminder of his impertinence to the Imam. Finally, we are reminded that like the prophets (*anbiyyā*), the Imams also uphold law and the normative order, a point that we often overlook in scholarly investigations of South Asian Muslim devotional practices.

Notes

- 1 Acknowledgment: This chapter is derived in part from an article published in *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* (2017), copyright Taylor & Francis, available online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2017.1335972>.

- 2 In *Everyday Shi'ism in South Asia*, I present a case-study of the Qutb Shahi-era Panjah Shah-e Wilayat 'āshūrkhānah which holds foot- and handprint relics of the Prophet Muhammad and 'Ali (2021: 141–146). Although I do not discuss Panjah Shah-e Wilayat in this chapter, it is worth noting the intercessory and wrathful power of the *panjah* in saving the 'āshūrkhānah from demolition in the nineteenth century.
- 3 Four months are considered sacred in the Islamic calendar, during which fighting is forbidden among Muslims: Muharram, Safar, Rajab, and Dhu'l Hijjah. Rajab is the month of blessed outpouring, "al-Rajab al-Asabb," a spiritually charged time for pious Shi'a who are promised by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq that fasting, penitence, and seeking God's mercy will be rewarded in abundance.
- 4 In the Qutb Shahi and Asaf Jahi periods there were three sandal processions, one from the Takiyya Rang 'Ali in the Old City, and the second from the Qadam-e Rasool, located on the hillock opposite Moula 'Ali, and the third from within Malkajgiri (Kugle 2010: 140). Sadiq Naqvi notes that during the pre-Independence period members of nearly every community in Hyderabad participated in the Moula 'Ali sandal processions including, "Hindu, Bairagi, Brahmin, Gosain, Mawari [sic], Britishers, Iranies, Turanies, Rummi, Shami, Arab, and Ajmi [sic] all gathered around this hillock" (2006: 37).
- 5 Masab Tank is an important neighborhood in Hyderabad located at the base of Road No. 1 in Banjara Hills and between Lakdi ka Pul and Humayun Nagar. The neighborhood grew up around the artificial lake built and endowed by "Ma Sahibah," Hayat Bakhshi Begum (d. 1077/1667). A little over 70 years ago, Hyderabad was a city with more than 2,800 lakes and springs, a half dozen rivulets, and the Musi River that not only watered the city's ample gardens and fruit orchards, but these also marked a sacred landscape.

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14

MUSLIM PILGRIMAGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Saints among the rice fields

Sophia Rose Arjana

The Muslim pilgrimages of Southeast Asia are a rich topic of study that include minority communities in Singapore, the majority in Malaysia, and the nation with the largest population of Muslims on earth – Indonesia (this is also addressed in this volume by Alatas). In recent years, interest in non-*hajj* pilgrimage has included work on Shi'i traditions (Ruffle, this volume), the pilgrimages of South (Xavier, this volume) and Central (Shanazarova, this volume) Asia, traditions found in the Mediterranean and North Africa, and other parts of the world (for an overview, Arjana 2017). The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the *ziarah* (pilgrimage) of Southeast Asia, through the Muslim communities and the survival of their pilgrimage sites, which are impacted by warfare, economic growth, and religious revivalism. The distinctiveness of these traditions is important, as they are located in a particular region with its own histories, cultures, and languages that are different than its Muslim neighbors to the West and East. As I argue in my forthcoming book, Southeast Asia accounts for the largest Muslim populations on earth, and, as such, Islamic practices there may be considered as normative, rather than the “othered” status it often receives in academic and popular discourse.

Another chief interest in this chapter is to address the question of how we treat Muslim pilgrimages in the regions that lie far from the origins of Muslim faith and power, e.g., Mecca, Baghdad, and Damascus. Islam, which scholars often treat solely as a religion that has its own theological and ritual truths, also constitutes a complex series of networks, communities, and traditions spread across the globe, some of which differ greatly from each other. Multi-centrality is one way to think about these questions of truth,

While in a global context Indonesia is regarded as Islamic periphery, the numerous centres of Islam within the country challenge the idea of the exclusive centrality of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina. Since the bearers of Islam were not only of Arabic descent, but also Indian, Persian and Chinese, multi-centrality is a natural concept in Indonesian Islam.

Lücking 2014: 133

Indonesian pilgrimage includes traditions that are so important that they take precedence over *hajj* (Rasmussen, this volume). As Mark Woodward has written, Javanese Muslims believe

that “seven pilgrimages to Imogiri [the cemetery outside Yogyakarta] can be substituted for one to Mecca” (Woodward 1989: 195). Indonesia is not exceptional in this regard, as these practices are found across Asia, in Western China, Central Asia, South Asia, and also have historical antecedent across West Asia. As Chiara Formichi reminds us, “The existence of a Muslim space of shared experiences and referents, which did not necessarily sanction ‘the Middle East’ as the most notable point of origin, is confirmed by a vast array of historical sources” (Formichi 2020: 5; she explores “second Meccas” at 2020: 50–53).

Throughout this chapter, I rely on the work of Edward Soja in thinking through the spaces that constitute Muslim pilgrimage in Southeast Asia. According to Soja, space is something constructed at several levels, Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. These levels can be understood as physicality, sociality, and corporeality. The interaction of these three interconnected typologies of space allows the individuals, rituals, and journeys that constitute Muslim pilgrimage to be centered. Bodies of men, women, and children (and in a few cases, animals) are thus the focus here. This chapter centers these bodies while questions of religious authority and “correct” ritual performance remain largely peripheral. This model recognizes the “simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence” (Soja 1996: 4). Furthermore, Thirdspace moves beyond the “social praxis of ‘firstspace’ and the discursive mediated ‘representations of ‘secondspace’” introduced by Foucault (Hancock, Faramelli, and White 2018: 3). Thirdspace provides choice and freedom; in this case, the choice of how *ziyarah* is envisioned and performed without much concern for the claims of “proper” Islamic orthopraxy.

This chapter first provides an assessment of “pilgrimage studies” which includes a discussion of the concept of *communitas*, the debate over “local” Islamic practice versus “orthodox” practice, and scholarship on Islamic pilgrimage in Asia. The topic of Islam in Southeast Asia, and in particular the impact of politics on *keramat*, prefaces the discussions of pilgrimage in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Throughout this chapter, I am attentive to the role of bodies in constituting and maintaining these traditions.

Reconsidering Islamic pilgrimage

The *hajj* is an obligatory journey for Muslims that has until recently occupied much of the academic literature on Islamic pilgrimage. Scholars of pilgrimage often identify *hajj* as the pilgrimage that best exemplifies *communitas*, the feeling of sacred community that is distinct from the mundane, non-religious everyday existence of social life. As I have written elsewhere,

For scholars, *hajj* may fulfill the romantic idea of pilgrimage as a journey that equalizes humans and places them in a collective mystic space. The familiar images of the pilgrimage to Mecca mirror this idealized vision of human pilgrimage – two million people gathered in one space, dressed in like manner to erase all social and racial divisions, praying together, walking together, and experiencing *communitas*, the sense of mystic togetherness that pilgrimage creates.

Arjana 2017: 140

Communitas is described as a phase of liminality where “the hierarchies and structures that usually define daily life are blurred, and the participants in the ritual experience a communion of equals” (Lücking 2014: 140). A concept first introduced by van Gennep in his work on ritual, it was later developed by the anthropologist Victor Turner as a central concept in understanding pilgrimage. Despite the grandeur of *hajj*, its reputation as a transformative experience and a

powerful locus of *communitas*, Muslims across the globe have thousands of other pilgrimages that fulfil important religious commitments. As discussed in my earlier work, these journeys range from small, family visits to an ancestor's grave to the transnational gatherings that number in the millions, such as the annual visit to Karbala that marks Husayn's martyrdom – reputedly the largest pilgrimage on earth. At Karbala and elsewhere, intercession is often part of the pilgrimage ritual. Known as *tawassul*, it follows a pattern of naming and offering.

Succinctly put, the *tawassul* is a ritual in which offerings are made for the benefit of various Muslims who are considered to occupy a position of favour with or close proximity to Allah. Performance of the *tawassul* consists of verbalizing the names of these Muslims, followed by the recitation of the first chapter of the Qur'an, *al-fatihah*.

Millie 2008: 107

Collectively, scholars often refer to these traditions as *ziyarah*. They are diverse, depending on the Muslim community and those who are held in high esteem or loved dearly. For Shi'i living in the Persian world, these journeys largely revolve around the Twelve Imams and their relatives (Ruffle, this volume). Southeast Asia has different *ziyarat* (pilgrimages, plural). As Syafiudun Zuhri explains, "*Ziarah* is a pilgrimage to holy places or sites. In Java, places for *ziarah* include the graves of *wali* and Muslim kings or nobles" (Zuhri 2013: 9).

The tendency to equate these traditions with "local" Islam and thus qualify them as the traditions of common people, outside of the correct behavior of proper Muslims, has been a major problem in the scholarship. Consider this *ziarah* that centers on an animal, a sacred tiger: one early-twentieth-century source reports of pilgrims who visited a sacred tiger in Malaysia:

Three nights running one Haji Muhammad Salleh dreamt that this tiger was sacred. And when his child fell ill, he vowed that if the infant recovered, he would bathe it at the door of the cave, sacrificing a white goat and burning incense. This he did, unharmed by its inhabitant. Today the tiger is very old and can hardly crawl. But people believe he is sacred.

Winstedt 1924: 270

Scholars have often dismissed the centrality of such traditions to the religious lives of Muslims, not just in Southeast Asia, but around the world. As I note in my 2017 book,

The focus on hajj is indicative of larger issues in the study of religion. Sunni Islam, which is often highlighted in academic studies of Islam, is viewed as a kind of Muslim Protestantism, as the correct historical and methodological sect that is superior to Shi'ism and other sects.

Arjana 2017: 28

This is a problematic view, especially in light of the fact that there is no consensus on the permissibility of *ziarah* as a practice. As Sumit Mandal has written about the Malaysian case, "Some reputable authorities have condemned visits to sacred tombs while others have found it permissible, but in clearly circumscribed terms" (Mandal 2019: 262).

Islam in Asia is a critical part of understanding Muslim belief, ritual, and tradition. Scholarship on the Muslim pilgrimage traditions of China, India, and Pakistan includes groundbreaking work like that of Kristian Petersen, whose scholarship on Chinese pilgrimage illuminates the

relationship between Sino-Islamic discourse and the experience of religious pilgrimage. In one case, Petersen exposes the importance of Ma Dexin's (1794–1874) *hajj* experience and its impact on Sino-Muslim understandings of the religious journey. As Petersen writes,

The intersubjectivity between Ma Dexin and his readers facilitated the domestication of the spiritual axis of the cosmos centered in Mecca, thus making it simultaneously native and foreign for the reader. This provided the catalyst for the deconstruction of Sino-Muslim alienation from the broader Muslim world and began the process of eliminating self-perceived social, financial, and geographic obstructions and limitations.

Petersen 2014: 353

Iran, located in western Asia, and the Shi'i traditions of pilgrimage associated with the Twelve Imams and their relatives, also mark an important contribution to the academic literature. This includes recent work by Edith Szanto (2012) and Pedram Khosronejad (2012). Southeast Asia has received less attention, scarce in comparison to other geographical regions that fall under the umbrella of Islamic Studies. By looking at some of the *ziarah* found in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, we can understand Muslim pilgrimage in Southeast Asia in different contexts, where Muslims are a minority (Singapore), where they are identified with the state religion (Malaysia), and where they are part of complex societies that also include Hindus, Buddhists, animists, and Christians (Indonesia).

Southeast Asia: Islam, politics, and pilgrimage

Southeast Asia is a large region that includes diverse religious communities, ethnic groups, and languages. These communities also feature distinct pilgrimage traditions. At the same time, important connections exist between different Southeast Asian Muslim traditions. Scholars have noted that these *sites of Asian interaction* are an important part of the story of Southeast Asia, such as in the *keramat* (graves visited as part of *ziarah*) that stretch from Mindanao to Cape Town, which are “at once deeply localized – and in that sense, immobile – sites, embedded in their littoral locales, and a site for the convergence of translocal networks, above all the Indian Ocean networks of the Hadrami diaspora” (Harper and Amrith 2012: 252).

The *keramat* that dominate Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore have gone through numerous iterations of scholarly classification. *Keramat* are often described as graves of “Muslim saints,” but are in reality a more complicated category of sites (Tschacher 2006: 228). In the early twentieth century, scholars included a large diversity of places, creatures, and individuals. One study from 1926 included six types of *keramat*, suggesting that there may have been an evolution in what is considered holy, or sacred, by large numbers of Muslims. The list follows: “(1) natural objects such as rocks, hilltops, caves, whirlpools, and so on; (2) sacred tigers and crocodiles; (3) graves of magicians; (4) graves of the founders of settlements; (5) graves of Muslim saints, and (6) living Muslim saints” (Winstedt 1924: 264). More recently, other scholars have classified these sites in terms of the dead and the living. *Keburan Keramat* are the graves (“miracle-working grave”), and *keramat hidup* are the living saints who are connected to miracles, which are rare but an important part of the history of Islam in Singapore and elsewhere in the region (Tschacher 2006: 228).

Sites of Islamic linkage in Southeast Asia are also important factors in the story of pilgrimage in the region. The *sayyid* who arrived in Southeast Asia from Arabia often found himself granted a high status, aligned with a family through marriage, and might end up as a powerful political figure (Alatas, this volume). “Contacts with Mecca and hospitality to foreign clerics, jurists,

scholars, and merchant-predicants at the Malay-Indonesian harbor-capitals expressed a clear religious bias which favored the *sāda*” (Kathirithamby-Wells 2009: 571). Links are important within Southeast Asia as well, with Indonesia often being identified as a sacred landscape of saints, tombs, and miracles. A contemporary example of this is Aceh as a place of learning and a civilizational center, called the *Serambi Mekkah*, or “Verandah of Mecca” (Mandal 2019: 266).

Contemporary religion and politics influence the practice of pilgrimage in the region. History, colonialism, religious resurgence, and the presence of different religions in the region, including Hinduism and Buddhism, all play a role in shaping religious practice, including pilgrimage. These factors help to account for the popularity of Hindu and Buddhist sites, visited by Muslims, as well as the adoption of Hindu figures as Muslim *wali*, which is quite common in Indonesia. In addition, there are traditions associated with *ziyarah* that reflect outside religious influences. One example are the offerings made at *keramat* in Singapore, which include yellow glutinous rice (*pulut kuning*) and red-dyed boiled eggs (*bunga telur*) (Tschacher 2006: 228). The “market-friendly and individualistic Muslim ethic” known as “*Islam de marché*” is another factor (Hefner 2010: 1038). This model, which includes the *imampreneurs* I write about, is often focused upon the search for wellbeing, health, and spiritual growth – goals often attached to pilgrimage (Arjana 2020: 4).

Southeast Asia has not remained untouched by the influence of Islamism, but it is a complicated mixture of global, modernist Muslim political movements and local organizations, which in some cases can be adversarial. The inroads made by conservative interpretations of Islam in the last half of the twentieth century include the growth of Salafi and Wahhabi movements, which offer strict models of Muslim religious behavior. These models include a strong opposition to pilgrimage traditions that lie outside of *hajj*.

However, in addition to the growing popularity of Islamist movements from outside Southeast Asia, and which have been tied to political violence in the region, Southeast Asia has a diverse number of religious organizations that influence how Muslims think about pilgrimage. As one example, Indonesia has the largest and second largest Muslim political organizations on earth – the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Muhammadiyah. The NU is committed to the preservation of “Indonesian Islam,” meaning an Islam that is not altered to fit other communities of Muslims. This includes the visiting of graves (*ziarah kubur*), a popular form of local pilgrimage found across the archipelago (Rabasa 2005: 97). The Muhammadiyah follows the teachings of Muslim modernists who are wary of so-called “local” traditions. Hence, whereas the Muhammadiyah “denies legitimacy to grave visiting and the practices associated with it” (Millie and Mayo 2019: 195), this organization is not in favor of returning to a utopian vision of early Islam, common to some Islamist groups. In practice, they are often aligned with the NU on social positions.

In the view of Muhammadiyah chairman Ahmad Syafii Maarif, Islamic law needs to be reformed, since in many cases it is no longer contextual to modern conditions. In recent years, there has also been a convergence, at least at the level of the elites, of NU and Muhammadiyah attitudes and religious practice.

Rabasa 2005: 98

While some Muhammadiyah may disapprove of *ziarah*, this does not mean its millions of followers don’t visit the graves of famous saints (*wali*) or participate in other religious practices associated with local or regional practice.

Indonesia reflects a synthesis of several sources of influence, all of which shape the practice of Islam. The dominant religious school in the region is the Shafi’i (Syafi’i) *madhab* (*mazhab*,

or legal school) (Rabasa 2005: 97). Local traditions – some of which predate Islam – also inform Muslim practice (this is not unique to Southeast Asia; see Xavier on Sri Lanka in this volume). Finally, Sufism (*tasawwuf*) in Southeast Asia is an important influence on pilgrimage. The Naqshbandiyah and Qadiriyyah are popular in Indonesia, among many other *tariqat* (Sufi orders) (Burke 2004: 39). Malaysia has also historically seen the presence of Sufism, both in Sufi-oriented teachers and in the activity of Sufi orders, which were integrated into Islamic learning, along with theology (*kalam*) and law (*fiqh*) (Burke 2004: 41). Singapore too has a history of Sufi activity that continues to the present day, including orders popular with Tamil Muslims. The presence of Sufi orders and survival of longstanding pilgrimage traditions help to explain why *ziyarah* has survived, to a lesser and greater degree, across Southeast Asia (Millie and Mayo 2019: 187).

Disappearing Keramat in Malaysia and Singapore

Islamic pilgrimage sites are found all over Asia, and as would be expected there are particular ritual protocols that Muslims follow when visiting them. *Ziyarah* often requires following rules that are similar to those followed when entering a mosque, including being clean and removing one's shoes. Not all *keramat* have places for doing ritual washing (*wudu*), but at a minimum, shoes are removed and left outside the sacred space of the tomb or grave. The following account reflects how important the sanctity of these places is:

A Malay woman told me that when she was a small girl she was taken to the Keramat Kuching, and in her excitement she dashed in without kicking off her shoes. That night she became feverish and her feet swelled up. Relief was only obtained when a suitable offering of *nasi kunyit* (yellow glutinous rice) was made and forgiveness begged.

Rivers 2003: 97

The reverse is also true, for *keramat* are reputed to be places of miracles, seen in the safety of Habib Nuh during wartime, and healing. One of the Long Graves (Kubor Panjang), visited in the early 2000s, featured burning incense, small stones and pieces of cloths hanging over the gravestones, and a family who had returned to thank the saint buried there for healing their sick child (Rivers 2003: 111).

Both Malaysia and Singapore have seen negative impacts on pilgrimage practices, due to two main factors – growing religious conservatism and increases in population that has encroached upon pilgrimage sites. *Keramat* dominate the religious landscape in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. These are burial sites, most often of Muslims, but occasionally of other individuals whose conduct during their lifetime garnered respect and, at times, reverence. Like many words used in this part of the world, *keramat* has its source in Arabic. “The word ‘*keramat*’ is derived from the Arabic noun *karāmāt* which refers to the miracles performed by a *walī*, a revered spiritual figure or ‘saint’ as it is often translated in English” (Mandal 2012: 357). *Keramat* exist in great variety in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, ranging from pre-Islamic sacred places adopted by Muslims, non-Muslim sites including Hindu and Buddhist monuments, old or disappeared graves, and places tied to spirits and curses. Non-Muslim *keramat* include those found in the forests that are of the indigenous, original people of Malaysia, known as the *Orang Asli* (Mandal 2012: 360). This conduct, unlike what is seen in Sufi settings in some other parts of the world, is not solely religious, but could be on account of their military or political achievements, or perhaps due to their reputation as a scholar and teacher.

In Singapore, stories include incidents of angry spirits interred at *keramat*. At one near Rangoon Road, “Two houses built nearby in the 1890s collapsed because of spirited displeasure” (Rivers 2003: 97). The question of how these graves developed into pilgrimage sites involves place – perhaps a battle, miraculous event, or establishment of a mosque. Pilgrims visit *keramat* to receive blessings from the saint and thus, the *keramat* “serves as a mediator of prayers” (Mandal 2012: 358). These sites then become places of meaning, made sacred by the body of the saint as well as the pilgrims who visit him (or less commonly, her), evoking Soja’s Thirdspace. Over time, *keramat* become places of *ziarah*, which may be popular with locals as well as Muslims from other parts of the world.

The *keramat* in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia are not all relics of the past, and in many cases they “remain sites of worship of reverence” (Harper and Amrith 2012: 255). Serving as places of rest for the dead and adored, these sites reflect upon the history of the community while serving as spaces in which to interact with this history in the present. They are active sites, not static places confined by a historical character. *Keramat* are typically fixed in a particular place, rather than transportable to the home or other location. As one study of Malaysian *keramat* notes, “A *keramat* is bound to the person and the location and is, thereby, not transportable” (Thimm 2017: 10).

Malaysia and Singapore are ethnically and linguistically diverse places. Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, but it has indigenous inhabitants, a sizeable Chinese population, and immigrants from Indonesia and elsewhere. Singapore, on the other hand, as a center of international business, has residents from Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa. Without a long digression into the political affairs of these countries, it is worth remembering that they have long histories that include settlement, immigration, colonialism, and transformation. In some instances, the tensions between different social communities involve Islam, and specifically pilgrimage. As one example, the Btsisi’ people of Malaysia, who live along the mangrove coasts of Selangor, West Malaysia, have a historical narrative that places their beginnings in Mecca (Nowak 2004: 307). One would assume they are Muslim, but despite identifying their origins in Mecca, they have a different path. Nowak explains, “As Muslims, Malays desire to travel from Malaysia to Mecca on the Haj. In the *trimbow* Btsisi’ did the opposite, they went from Mecca and Medina to Smanjong, the Malay Peninsula” (Nowak 2004: 307). This story of pilgrimage constructs an identity for the Btsisi’ that is distinct from Muslims and rejects a Malay identity that is distinct from claims that the Btsisi’ are the original inhabitants of Malaysia.

In Malaysia, unlike Singapore, Islam is the official religion and is strongly tied to Malay identity. According to the Btsisi’, this Malay/Muslim relationship is one reason why they reject a Malay classification (Nowak 2004: 307). The impact of Islamic authorities on pilgrimage is also an issue for Muslims. Despite Sufism and its associated rituals and traditions – including pilgrimage – being present for hundreds of years, there has been an emphasis of *hajj* and a delegitimization of *ziarah* over recent decades. According to one study,

Whereas the performance of the *hajj* has been supported by the Islamic authorities in Malaysia since the early 1960s, Islamic authorities in Malaysia since the early 1960s, visiting *keramat* is problematized or even criminalized, as the *keramat* are rooted in syncretic traditions.

Thimm 2017: 12

The insistence that *ziarah* are aligned with an inauthentic practice of Islam is one of the ways that Islamic authorities impact pilgrimage, although it is unclear how much impact these opinions have on the practice across generations. The power of pilgrims is often in tension

with efforts to police the movement of bodies at religious sites. According to at least one study, younger Malaysians are less familiar with *keramat*, an effect of these sentiments on Muslims who have been exposed to Islamic revivalism in recent decades (Yeoh 2016: 73). Specifically, authorities have stated which *ziarah* are allowed, and one of these places is *not* located in Malaysia.

The religious authority of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the federation, lists two sites that are not only permissible but should be visited because of the *pahala* (merit) that may be gained from the action; these are the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina and the graves of parents.

Mandal 2019: 262

Muslims have numerous pilgrimages in Malaysia that are focused on visiting the graves of historical figures ranging from teachers to Sufis. The location of some *keramat* are also tied to other communities and traditions. One case of this is found in Negeri Sembilan at Keramat Ujong Pasir, which is reputedly the grave of a Hadhrami that lies near “three megaliths attributed with supernatural powers” (Mandal 2012: 361). In other cases, the rituals performed at *keramat* may be Hindu or Buddhist in origin, such as in the case of the offerings made at graves and tombs in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. At one saint’s grave in Raub, sick pilgrims bathed in the water there, tied flags, and drank the water that surrounded the grave (Winstedt 1924: 273). Numerous accounts of pilgrimage to the graves of Sufis also exist in Malaysia, including two *wali* buried in Malacca that were associated with magical dreams and apparitions of strange creatures (Winstedt 1924: 275).

Reward for piety is one of the main reasons Malay Muslims visit *keramat*, as indicated by this pilgrim who visited the grave of Tok Kenali, a *wali* (saint) from Kelantan, “*Keramat* is help from Allah granted to selected people to reward their piety” (Thimm 2017: 11). The reward are blessings on the pilgrim bestowed by the saint and the place he or she occupies. Despite the religious importance of these places, they have often not survived, either due to development or the opinions of religious authorities. In 1991, the State Religious Department relocated five graves in Melaka (Malacca) and then took more severe steps to curtail *ziarah*,

A decade later, the authorities tore down illegal structures at graveyards on the island where people continued to “make offerings in the hope that they would get rid of ailments afflicting them or their families or to strike a jackpot.”

Rivers 2003: 99

Muslims in Singapore are a minority that live in a society characterized by business, economics, and an urban lifestyle. Singaporean Muslims include famous musicians, celebrities, and Sufi activists like Khalid Ajmain and Ainun Harun, whose groundbreaking work on the problem of domestic violence emerged out of their annual Sacred Path of Love conference (Arjana 2021: 390–404). Sufism remains active in Singapore through the activities of numerous orders, including the Qadiriyya, whose Indian shaykh is buried on Siglap Hill and visited by his followers on Sundays for *zikr* (the Sufi ritual of remembrance) (Rivers 2003: 116–117). Tamil Muslim immigrants include those belonging to Sufi orders active within Singapore and elsewhere, and often are active participants in pilgrimage. In the case of the Chistiyya al-Qadiriyya, they are part of 5,000 followers who perform *ziyarat* to Hyderabad to attend the death anniversary (*‘urs*) of their founder (Tschacher 2006: 235). Alongside Muslims, many other religious communities have *keramat*. These include the now gone Sikh Keramat that was on the grounds of a hospital and the also gone Soo Nan and Soh Ping Chinese *keramat* (Rivers 2003: 98).

Among the most famous *keramat* in Singapore is the Habib Noh grave, which is located on top of Mount Palmer. Unlike some of the simpler gravesites in Singapore, Habib Noh's resting place is a *makam* (tomb), which is fitting due to the fact that Muslims believe he was a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammad. Habib Noh (Habib Nuh) was known for his piety and kindness towards children, to whom he was known to give money while on his walks. According to some traditions, he could walk on water and was able to transport himself anywhere – including to Mecca (Rivers 2003: 108). After his death, his tomb became a place of *ziarah* and is believed to be protected. According to one account, "His sanctity was confirmed when, during the Japanese attacks on Singapore, the site was untouched by bombs or shells that fell about the harbor" (Rivers 2003: 108). Habib Noh's shrine is visited by Muslims of all backgrounds – Malays, Tamils, Arabs – and on the birthday celebration of the saint (*maulud*), the tomb complex is decorated with "lights, green and yellow flags, and wall hangings, much as a shrine in India would be, and food is distributed to the devotees" (Tschacher 2006: 237). Stories of miraculous transport, visions, and miracles are common in the Sufi tradition, not just in Southeast Asia, but across the world.

Keramat have been disappearing for decades in Singapore, due in large part to development projects. However, the existence of pilgrimage sites predates Singapore's founding in 1819, and many more graves and tombs popular with pilgrims emerged over the following 150 years. As Tschacher reminds us, Singapore was more reminiscent of Indonesia in the past, with saints' graves in the dozens, perhaps as many as 70 at the highpoint of pilgrimage activity (Tschacher 2006: 227). The role of housing developments in the disappearance of *keramat* in Singapore was noted to me by friends when I visited in 2019. Old sites have often been taken over by housing developments or business ventures, while others have been moved. I recall trying to visit a sacred mosque related to a *wali* located in the city. On arrival, I found it was surrounded by construction and I could not find a way in. In other cases, the location of a grave has been lost, "Maj. Jamil searched for the Keramat Maliki cared for by his grandfather, but he could not locate it, although he visited the Kampong Muslim Maliki burial ground in Sennet Estate" (Rivers 2003: 116). In Malaysia, visiting *keramat* has been affected by the intrusions of Islamic authorities, and in Singapore, by development; we find a more complicated situation in Indonesia, in part due to its immense size.

Islands of the *Wali*

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country on earth and its pilgrimage traditions are extremely varied and diverse. Visiting the graves of famous saints is most often identified in the academic literature with the *wali songo*, the nine founding saints of Islam in Java; however, *ziarah* is a broad and diverse practice in Indonesia that is not restricted to one island or to one group of holy figures. Indonesia is a place with a long history and as such, there are adoptions of places and individuals into the Muslim religion. A popular practice is then the visit to adopted holy men (and sometimes women) who were formerly Hindu, seen at places like Batutulis in Bogor. Muslims also visit local graves and tombs, old mosques connected to holy men, natural sites identified with magical stories and saints, and the graves of politicians and historical figures. These religious pilgrimages are distinct from the Muslim pilgrims who visit Hindu and Buddhist sites, most notably Borobudur, the largest Buddhist temple in the world. While these places, popular with both Indonesian Muslims and tourists from abroad, are not Islamic, they are tied to strong beliefs about Indonesian culture, history, and its rich history of religious monuments.

In Java, some *keramat* are built upon Hindu and Buddhist sites (Mandal 2012: 361). Meditation practices, which are likely influenced by Hinduism or Buddhism, also persist in contemporary

Javanese pilgrimage. Pilgrims to Mount Lawu immerse themselves in sacred water and engage in one of two types of meditation – *semedi* or *tapa* – as part of their rituals of *ziarah* (Arjana 2017: 147). In other cases, Hindu holy men are refashioned as Muslims. These adoptions of Hindu places and people as Muslim is part of the diverse portrait of pilgrimage in Indonesia, which is also influenced by *kejawen*, the Javanese practice of religion that often incorporates Hindu and Buddhists traditions into everyday Muslim practice – not just pilgrimage.

In Bali, a majority Hindu island, more recent “discoveries” of sainthood narratives and associated graves have been reported. In one case, an individual reported receiving a *hātīf* (a whisper, or message from Allah) that there were seven graves of Balinese Muslim saints (Zuhri 2013: 4). Each of these graves is associated with a story of the saint, including one of Habib Ali bin Abu Bakr al Hamid, who “continues to be capable of delivering punishment to people in Kusamba if they commit misdeeds” (Zuhri 2013: 7). These seven saints are largely visited by Balinese Muslims and Javanese from East Java, in fairly small numbers, who visit on Fridays and the first day of Muharram (*jumat kilwon* and *satu soro*) to pray, recite the Qur’an, and listen to the *silsila* (the history of the saint that is traced back to Prophet Muhammad’s family) as told by the gatekeeper (*juru kunci*) of the grave (Zuhri 2013: 6, 10).

In addition to the major saints, there are countless others who include the founders of early mosques, mysterious travelers from abroad, and local holy men and women who may be known in one community or are so famous that they are visited by Muslims from places as far afield as Cairo. As noted earlier, the foreign Muslims, referred by one scholar as “priest-kings,” were often accrued status due to their links to Mecca, Jedda, or another Islamic city (Kathirithamby-Wells 2009: 570). The mosque of Luar Batang in Jakarta is one such site, identified with the tomb of a Hadrami from the al-‘Aydarūs family (Mandal 2012: 364). These individuals – the Hadrami and others – come after the *wali songo*, whose graves are some of the most popular sites of Muslim pilgrimage in Southeast Asia.

Let’s return to the *wali songo*. These *keramat* are different than many of the individual pilgrimage sites discussed in this chapter than are found in Southeast Asia due to the fact that they are a network, reminiscent of the Imamzadeh of the Shi’i or other sites linked together into a system. The *wali songo* “constitute a well-established and interconnected *ziarah*” (Mandal 2012: 364). They included warriors, teachers, and traders. Their links to Prophet Muhammad’s family include genealogies that tie them to the relatives of Muhammad, “According to one tradition, the origin of the *wali* (14 instead of the widely accepted nine), is traced to Hadhrami genealogical sources” (Kathirithamby-Wells 2009: 570). These *keramat* are not only important for Indonesians to visit but are quite famous, due in part to their reputed role in introducing Islam to Java and the blessings that Muslims believe are attached to them. As one study notes,

It may not be coincidental then that many outstanding *keramat* emerged in the period between 1500 and 1800 in places like Aceh, Penang, Melaka, Jakarta, and Surabaya. Among the oldest and most well-known are the graves of the *walī* (*Wali Songo*) who are credited with introducing Islam to Java. Dating back to the sixteenth century, these graves constitute one of the most auspicious of present-day pilgrimage routes.

Mandal 2012: 359

The popularity of the graves of the *wali songo* is but one example of pilgrimage among Muslims in Indonesia. Popular politicians and religious leaders are also associated with *ziarah kubur*, the visitation of graves that is so common in Java, Lombok, and on other islands in the archipelago. The visits to the graves of relatives in village cemeteries in Java is one popular practice that I have observed in my own fieldwork. There are also pilgrimages to ancestors

who may offer a blessing or good fortune to those who make offerings and prayers. One example are the business pilgrims who travel to Mount Kawi, a place “for making deals with unseen beings in the hope of success in business or of obtaining a windfall” (Millie and Mayo 2019: 193).

One other example is the annual pilgrimage to the grave of Gus Dur, the fourth President of Indonesia who also served as the head of the Nahdlatul Ulama. These pilgrimages continue to this day, but in 2001, a huge gathering commenced around Gus’s grave. According to one report,

thousands of religious students jointly performed two million recitations of the chapter *Al-Ikhlās* and several hundred of the entire Qur’an, generating a great amount of merit that added to the spiritual power that the deceased was able to emit from the grave.

Rabasa 2005: 107

The belief that this spiritual power is increased by the presence of bodies reflects a key point of Soja’s Thirdspace – the power that bodies have to shape and define space.

These gatherings often, but not always, involve the ritual of *tawassul* discussed earlier, which is performed at pilgrimage sites and also at home, to invoke the saint or holy person. This represents another example of Thirdspace, where individuals construct sacred space through their bodily actions. In one account of a pilgrimage (*jarah*) to a network of seven tombs in Banten, pilgrims carried lists of the tombs and their occupants with them so that they could form a relationship with the deceased individual (Millie 2008: 115). Only after this relationship was established would the benefit of *tawassul* be transportable to the home space. “The *tawassul* would gain efficacy as a result of the contact made at the tomb, and this would benefit himself and the other occupants of the house. By visiting the tomb, he had established a relationship of *perantaraan* (mediation)” (Millie 2008: 115). Intercession may look different depending on the pilgrimage, such as in Java where some *ziarah* involve *arwah leluhur* (the spirits of dead ancestors) (Millie and Mayo 2019: 193). In these instances, offerings are made directly to the dead ancestors, rather than through an intercessory individual to Allah (Millie and Mayo 2019: 193).

Intercession is a touchy topic for some Muslims, including those who regard it as a form of *bid’a*, or “innovation.” The inroads made by stricter interpretive models of Islam in Indonesia, as well as the popularity of the Muhammadiyah, seem to have a limited effect on the popularity of *ziarah*. Some of this involves the “respectful accommodation” between the NU, who promote these practices, and the Muhammadiyah (Millie and Mayo 2019: 187). However, Muslims, as they have done in many other parts of the world, have largely continued to visit the graves, tombs, and other spaces associated with saints, politicians, and other individuals, ignoring the opinions of religious authorities. As one study remarked,

Despite the circulation of modernist critiques of grave visiting, some gravesites have developed as centers of massive pilgrimage activity. The graves of the nine saints (Javanese: *wali songo*) – commemorated as pioneers of Islam in Java – consistently draw large crowds, as they have done for centuries.

Millie and Mayo 2019: 187

The survival of *ziarah* in Southeast Asia and the popularity of networks of sites like the *wali songo* suggests that human bodies have a large role in constructing meaning surrounding Muslim pilgrimage. Without denying the power of religious authorities, governmental institutions, and

modernist ideology on Muslim practice, the existence of pilgrimage among Southeast Asian Muslims reflects the view of Soja that space is a fluid and active entity, impacted by its physical forms, the culture it exists in, the social actors that occupy it.

Conclusions

Pilgrimage in Southeast Asia includes a wide variety of sacred sites attached to relatives, saints, and other religious figures. At times, religious figures are adopted from earlier religious traditions. One such case is Batutulis in Bogor, Indonesia, where the Hindu Sri Baduga Maharaja has become a Sufi figure, his shrine identified with miraculous powers. In other cases, non-Islamic practices are incorporated into Muslim practice, such as the offerings found at *keramat* in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Pilgrimage is also a tradition that has seen diminishing power, especially in Malaysia, where it has been cast as un-Islamic by some religious authorities, and in Singapore, where it has been affected by urban growth and the need for more housing. In Indonesia, the NU and Muhammadiyah are often contesting religious opinions on pilgrimage, which arguably continues to flourish in Java, Lombok, and other islands. The survival of many of these sites reflects Soja's view of Thirdspace, where pilgrims create their own meaning out of the experience of *ziarah*, rather than relying upon the dictates of religious and governmental authorities.

The cases of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia reflect the realities of Muslim religious life, which is not limited to its oft-referenced examples located in the Middle East. The fact that these traditions are not highlighted more is owed to the academic study of Islam being tied to a historical legacy of colonialism. As Chiara Formichi states at the outset of this volume, "Ethnographic interest in Muslim societies emerged as a hallmark of Euro-American colonial scholarship and administration across Africa and Asia, and it was sustained until the mid-twentieth century." Orientalism insisted that Arabs, and their practice of Islam, was co-identified with Islam writ large. It is only through the continued study of other Muslim communities that this reductionism can be undone.

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ḤAḌRAMĪ SUFI-SCHOLARS AND THEIR SHRINES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A geography of sanctity

Ismail Fajrie Alatas

On the outskirts of the public cemetery of Sapuro in Pekalongan, Central Java (Indonesia), stands the mausoleum of Aḥmad b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1929), a Sufi-scholar from the Ḥaḍramawt valley of South Arabia who is regarded today as the city’s principal saint.¹ Every day, the mausoleum hosts devout pilgrims, who come from all over Java to pray for and seek the blessing of the deceased scholar. The number of visitors significantly increases on auspicious times such as Thursday night or Friday morning, or before Ramaḍān when Indonesian Muslims welcome the onset of the holy month by visiting the graves of saints, scholars, and family members. In front of the mausoleum is a small bazaar selling local commodities like batik cloth, sarongs, prayer caps, and alcohol-free perfumes. Buses transporting pilgrims are parked along the road leading to the mausoleum, bearing license plates from all over Java. Some locals living around the mausoleum have transformed parts of their homes into modest restaurants and inns that cater to the steady flow of pilgrims. Every year, on the fourteenth of Sha’bān, two weeks before the beginning of the holy month of Ramaḍān, tens of thousands of pilgrims descend into Pekalongan to attend the annual commemoration (*ḥawl*) of al-‘Aṭṭās. Muslim scholars come with their families and followers from all over Java, Sumatra, and even as far as the Ḥaḍramawt (Yemen) and Saudi Arabia. The commemorative ritual is held at the mausoleum and led by one of al-‘Aṭṭās’s descendants, recognized as his official successor or surrogate. The commemoration involves communal prayers for the saint, recitation of his hagiography (*manāqib*), and sermons by attending scholars, and concludes with a communal feast (Alatas 2014). Al-‘Aṭṭās is one among many Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Java who are today widely regarded as saints (Ar. *walī* pl. *awliyā*), and whose tombs have become pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) destinations. There are presently more than 52 major ritual commemorations annually held at different Ḥaḍramī saintly shrines across Muslim Southeast Asia.

This chapter charts the historical emergence of Ḥaḍramī shrines in Southeast Asia, with a specific focus on Java. For a broader look at pilgrimages in this volume, see Arjana (Southeast Asia), Xavier (Sri Lanka), Ruffle (South Asia), and Shanazarova (Central Asia). This chapter examines how these sites came to be recognized as important nodes in “an interconnected transoceanic sacred geography” (Jacob 2019: 187) that connects Southeast Asia to South Arabia

and beyond. While Southeast Asia may seem peripheral from the point of view of the Islamic heartlands, for Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars and their followers residing in the Ḥaḍramawt, the Hejaz, East Africa, and elsewhere, the region is a “well-known territory and by no means peripheral” (Bang 2003: 91). For these actors, Southeast Asia is perceived as a spiritually significant region where Ḥaḍramī saints once lived and their traces remain, thereby making it into an important pilgrimage destination. The chapter traces the concrete socio-discursive processes that sustain this *geography of sanctity*. It shows how such a perception of Southeast Asia is produced over time and becomes recognizable to some Muslims, but not others. This geography of sanctity coexists with other Islamic “imaginative geographies” (Said 1979: 49) and competes with alternative perceptions of Southeast Asia.

Scholars working on Islam in Southeast Asia have amply charted the movements of Southeast Asian Muslims to the Middle East. Muslims with physical and financial means are, of course, obliged to embark on the *hajj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in their lifetime (see Rasmussen, this volume). Many pilgrims from the Indonesian Archipelago have traditionally prolonged their stay in the Hejaz to acquire religious knowledge (Azra 2004; Laffan 2003; Tagliacozzo 2013). In the early twentieth century, Cairo emerged as another destination for higher education and pilgrimage (Abaza 1993; Laffan 2003; Roff 1970). More recently, the Ḥaḍramawt has emerged as another pilgrimage destination for Southeast Asian Muslims (Alatas 2016). Read alongside one another, these works attest to multiple Islamic imaginative geographies perceived and traversed by Southeast Asian Muslims, each sustained by a variety of imagery, discourse, and text. While these works have attested to the fact that Southeast Asian Muslims have, for a long time, been an integral part of trans-regional Islamic networks, the imaginative geographies they point to are ultimately of the Middle East. Consequently, it is always Southeast Asians who travel to the Middle East for pilgrimage or educational purposes and not the other way around. Of course, pilgrimage to the tomb of Muslim saints has a long precedent among Southeast Asian Muslims. The annual rituals held at the tomb of Shaykh Burhanuddin in Ulakan, West Sumatra (Ronkel 1914), and at the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati in Cirebon, West Java (Muhaimin 2006) – to name a few – are examples of established pilgrimage practice. Yet the spiritual significance of these shrines is usually discussed either as local, national or at best, regional phenomena (Quinn 2019; Slama 2014). The overall picture that emerges from these works thus helps to strengthen the commonly held view of Southeast Asia as an Islamic periphery. Those from the peripheries recognize the spiritual significance of, and embark on a pilgrimage to, the so-called central lands, but not the other way around.

Focusing on the historical and contemporary itineraries of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars uncovers an alternative Islamic imaginative geography that centrally features Southeast Asia and cannot be easily fitted into the established center-periphery model because its significance is recognized by actors beyond the region, including those from the “central lands.” This geography of sanctity is long in the making. In the nineteenth century, for instance, many Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in the Ḥaḍramawt perceived Southeast Asia as simply a worldly destination, a place with corrupting influences on one’s rectitude. The transfiguration of Southeast Asia as a spiritually significant region for Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars is, therefore, a historical achievement. It is an outcome of slow but steady socio-discursive processes involving actors of different generations from across the Indian Ocean. At the heart of these processes is a conscious attempt to stabilize meaning and interpretation through spatialized link-making (Coleman 2014; Stasch 2011). In tracing this development, I rely on a dependable guide who had spent his life charting this geography of sanctity. The tome he left behind, a work of 40 years in the making, is our spatiotemporal map for this endeavor. It is to this work that I first turn.

The Crown of Brides

That we know the lives of many Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Southeast Asia in considerable detail owes to several scholars who composed their hagiographies based on oral and written materials. Among them was ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1979), a Ḥaḍramī emigre who arrived in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in 1910 to learn from Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Java, after studying in the Ḥaḍramawt and the Hejaz. ‘Alī devoted his life collecting various materials, and the outcome of this lifelong commitment was a posthumously published two-volume tome in Arabic entitled *Tāj al-ā’rās* (*Crown of Brides*) that charts the trans-generational and trans-regional movements and activism of, as well as miracles associated with Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars (al-‘Aṭṭās 1979).

The *Tāj al-ā’rās* was composed as a hagiography of a major Ḥaḍramī saint by the name of Ṣāliḥ b. ‘Abdallāh al-‘Aṭṭās (d. 1863), known as the holy man of the ‘Amd valley in Ḥaḍramawt. Ṣāliḥ’s own biography and tales of the miracles he performed, however, is just one small part of the book. The bulk of the book recounts the lives of Ṣāliḥ’s teachers, contemporaries, disciples, and those who had intellectual connections with him and his children. What ought to be a book about a single individual turns out to become a biographical encyclopedia (*tarājim*) of interconnected Sufi-scholars who lived across the Indian Ocean between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. ‘Alī’s pen charted a geography of sanctity made up of spiritually significant names and places linked to them. The tome maps the mobility of myriad actors who were the vectors in the transmission of Islamic teachings across time and space, many of whom succeeded in establishing new centers of Islam in different localities, whether Baroda (India), Rangoon (Burma), Singapore, or Bondowoso (Java). Such imaginative geography defies popular imaginaries of a Muslim world made up of unchanging centers and peripheries. Instead, it projects multiple centers of Islam and charts various moral travels between regions that cannot be reduced to single directionality.

The *Tāj al-ā’rās*, with its meticulous penchant for biographical details, affords a granular perspective into the emergence of a geography of sanctity that centrally features Southeast Asia. The book opens up the histories of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars, all of whom played their roles in the transfiguration of Southeast Asia as a spiritually significant region, whether by building congregational centers, instituting rituals, or assembling durable religious communities. As a textual inscription, the book links names, places, and histories through mobility. While one can rely on the *Tāj al-ā’rās* for the historical information it contains, as I will do in the following sections, one should also keep in mind its character as an ideological project that seeks to shape the way its Arabophone readers perceive Southeast Asia. As a work that uncovers and represents saintly histories, the book can be used for the purpose of historical reconstruction. In representing the histories of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Southeast Asia, however, the book strives to persuade its readers to recognize the spiritual significance of Southeast Asia. More than just a biographical encyclopedia, the *Tāj al-ā’rās* projects a pilgrimage map that a pious Arabic-speaking traveler can rely on to seek places in Southeast Asia where God’s friends (i.e., saints) once walked, worshipped, and taught, where their remains are buried, as well as the timing of their annual commemoration.

Sacred valleys, worldly destination

While, today, Sufi-scholars in the Ḥaḍramawt regard Southeast Asia as an important pilgrimage destination, such a view is quite recent. In the nineteenth century, many Sufi-scholars of the Ḥaḍramawt perceived Southeast Asia as a region of import only for those interested in worldly pursuits. This disdainful attitude towards Southeast Asia owed to the perception of the

Ḥaḍramawt as a spiritually charged region on the one hand, and to the increasing economic migration of Ḥaḍramīs to Southeast Asia on the other. Understanding these two motivations behind the Sufi-scholars' condescension towards Southeast Asia is important for charting the subsequent change in their perception of the region.

In the writings of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars, the worldly “Java” (*jāwā*) – a term commonly used by the Arabs as “a synecdoche for Southeast Asia derived from the insular toponym ‘Java’” (Laffan 2003: 13) – is often compared to the spiritually charged Ḥaḍramawt, a region made sacred by the footsteps of Bā ‘Alawī Sufis, who for long have traversed its valleys. Recognized as the descendants (Ar. *sayyid*, Pl. *sāda*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Bā ‘Alawīs have lived in the Ḥaḍramawt since the tenth century. They trace their descent from ‘Alawī b. ‘Ubaydillāh (d. beginning of the eleventh century), hence the name Bā ‘Alawī or Banī ‘Alawī (children of ‘Alawī) (al-Shillī 1982: vol. 1, 69–76). In the thirteenth century, a Bā ‘Alawī scholar, Muḥammad b. ‘Alī (d. 1255), instituted his own Sufi tradition, which became known as the Ṭarīqa ‘Alawiyya, or Ṭarīqa Sāda Banī ‘Alawī (The Sufi path of the children of ‘Alawī) (al-Shāṭirī 1983: vol. 2, 253). Over time, the Ṭarīqa ‘Alawiyya became the dominant Islamic tradition in the Ḥaḍramawt. Like other South Arabian Sufi orders, this *ṭarīqa* remained as a spiritual lineage built on family ties and sporadic master–disciple relationships (Knysh 2010). Bā ‘Alawī Sufi-scholars cultivated religious communities in different parts of the Ḥaḍramawt and were venerated by local tribes. Upon their death, domed mausoleums were built upon their graves (Bujra 1971; Knysh 1993; Serjeant 1962). These shrines, which dotted the valleys of the Ḥaḍramawt, have continued to serve as pilgrimage destinations and sites for the transmission of religious knowledge. In the writings of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars, the existence of these mausoleums in the hinterlands of Ḥaḍramawt is presented as conferring “new spiritual potencies upon places that had been religiously empty” (Ho 2006: 59). Thus, in an oft-recited poem, the Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1720) wrote, “fortunate is he who visits them [i.e., the saintly shrines] with sincerity, for by the blessing of those visits, what they seek will come true” (al-Ḥaddād 2003: 261).

Despite these idealized depictions of the Ḥaḍramawt as a sacred valley, many Ḥaḍramīs left their homeland and traveled across the Indian Ocean in search of a better life. Since at least the seventeenth century, Ḥaḍramīs had been emigrating in increasing numbers to Southeast Asia. Internal strife and limited opportunities in the Ḥaḍramawt, together with the ample economic opportunities abroad, drove the sons of the valley to leave their homeland (Boxberger 2002; Freitag 2003; Ho 2006). Many were forced to emigrate after facing financial difficulties at home. There were families in need of support, debts demanding repayment, houses falling apart, and lands requiring capital injection to cultivate. For Ḥaḍramīs, Southeast Asia conjured up dreams of endless possibilities. Stories abound, circulating in towns and hamlets along the dry riverbeds of Ḥaḍramawt, about fortunate emigres who went from rags to riches, although there were also dreadful accounts of those who got lost or drowned. Advances in maritime transportation in the early nineteenth century resulted in an increasing presence of Ḥaḍramīs in Southeast Asia (Feener 2010: 39–68; Freitag 2003; Gelvin and Green 2014: 1–24). The sphere of Ḥaḍramī mercantile activities was, for the most part, centered on the sea and the littorals (Clarence-Smith 2009: 140). Others, like the merchant ‘Umar b. ‘Alī al-Junayd (d. 1852) invested in properties in the burgeoning port city of Singapore, leading to the substantial expansion of his family's fortune (al-Junayd 1994: 167–180; Ho 2006: 82–3). This expanding world of Ḥaḍramī merchants opened up opportunities for new migrants from the Ḥaḍramawt.

The increasing number of emigrants who left for Southeast Asia made the region suspect in the eyes of the Sufi-scholars of Ḥaḍramawt. Whereas in their writings, the Ḥaḍramawt

is depicted as a sacred valley, Southeast Asia is often described as an ill-fated region and its inhabitants wayward. Unlike Ḥaḍramawt, Southeast Asia is dubbed a region “bereft of a noble history,” and its people have “predilections towards corruptions” (al-Miḥḍār 1878: 9). It is a place “where religion and pedigree are not valued,” wrote the Sufi-scholar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Miḥḍār (d. 1886) (al-Miḥḍār 1878: 9). In the eyes of these Sufi-scholars, Southeast Asia was simply a worldly destination, a region where their compatriots pursue wealth and lose their religious and moral bearings. Thus, the Sufi-scholar, Muḥsin b. ‘Alawī al-Saqqāf (d. 1873), whose career as the judge of Say‘ūn was spent adjudicating conflicts and feuds involving the nouveau riche Ḥaḍramī migrants, wrote in one of his poems:

Forget Java. By the wells you stay, for here is ease;
Contentment is wealth, in it well-being and peace.
The satisfied stay with their folk, to Java they don’t aspire.
Ah, the clear life, with neither meddling nor discord.
Oh people of now, what’s this dimness of sight?
Your cares over money, the cause of enmity.

quoted in Ho 2006: 82

Al-Saqqāf’s sentiment towards the migrants was one that was shared by many Sufi-scholars of his day who actively tried to dissuade their compatriots from migrating to Southeast Asia, albeit to limited success. In their views, migration had detrimental impacts not just on migrants themselves, but also on the Ḥaḍramawt. Problems generated by rising migration abounds, including the shortage of able-bodied workers to develop agricultural fields, the conspicuous consumption of families with ties to Southeast Asia, the rising wealth inequality, and the neglect of migrants’ families left behind (Bādhīb 2005: 113; Boxberger 2002: 137–145; Freitag 2003: 123). The last problem was particularly acute and persisted as late as the 1930s when the English traveler Freya Stark visited the valley. She wrote, “our slave poor as a rat himself, has just brought in a woman with children to feed whose husband had vanished in Java: it is a story I hear every day” (Stark [1940] 2002: 145).

Despite these negative portrayals of Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century, not all Ḥaḍramīs who migrated to Southeast Asia ended up forsaking their religion or families back home. Many have indeed become rich, but they used their accrued wealth to establish endowments for religious institutions in Southeast Asia and the Ḥaḍramawt. There were also those who went to Southeast Asia not only to seek their livelihood but also to transmit Islamic teachings and cultivate religious communities. It is the itineraries of these individuals, often ignored in the broad brushstroke depictions of Southeast Asia as a worldly destination from the quills of Sufi-scholars like al-Miḥḍār and al-Saqqāf that ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn al-‘Aṭṭās was determined to memorialize when he envisaged the *Tāj al-‘arās*.

Sufi migrants in distant islands

As the nineteenth century progressed, an increasing number of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars affiliated with the Ṭarīqa ‘Alawiyya migrated to Southeast Asia, where they were able to achieve upward social mobility. They usually arrived in Southeast Asia following a period of study in the Ḥaḍramawt and other centers of Islamic learning such as the Hejaz. Some took on a full-time position in Southeast Asia, such as becoming a religious teacher in a formal educational institution sponsored by local rulers, aristocrats, or the Ḥaḍramī mercantile elites. Others took on positions in the local Islamic judiciary, with a few even rising to occupy the highest legal

offices in different Southeast Asian Muslim sultanates, such as that of *muftī* (jurisconsult) or *qāḍī* (judge). Some of these emigré Sufi-scholars were able to develop close ties to local rulers. Shaykh b. Aḥmad Bāfaqīh (d. 1872), for example, served as the personal religious tutor of the princes of Sumenep, on the island of Madura. He spent 25 years in Sumenep, where he commanded a considerable influence in the royal court, before moving to Surabaya, where he passed away (Berg 1989 [1886]: 109). Others were taken as sons-in-law by local rulers. Through such alliances, several Ḥaḍramī scholars succeeded in forming their own polities, such as the sultanates of Pontianak (Borneo), Perlis (Malaya), Siak Indragiri (Sumatra), and the emirate of Kubu (Borneo) (Ho 2006: 152–180). Yet there were still others who preferred less glamorous positions, whether as informal teachers, preachers, and prayer leaders in local mosques and prayer halls (*langgar*), whilst simultaneously pursuing mercantile activities to make ends meet.

Aside from recounting the biographies of these learned migrants, the *Tāj al-ā'rās* also tells stories of Ḥaḍramīs who traveled to Southeast Asia for worldly purposes but ended up becoming Sufi-scholars in the process. These stories begin with Southeast Asia as a worldly destination, where migrants were able to fulfill their financial needs. Mercantile purposes took these migrants to faraway places where they serendipitously encountered Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars. At the hands of these Sufi-scholars, the migrants experienced spiritual conversion and decided to dedicate their lives to tread the Sufi path. Take the life of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿAṭṭās (d. 1886) for example. Aḥmad left his arid homeland as a young man, after experiencing financial hardship, to seek fortune in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, the *Tāj al-ā'rās* mentions that Aḥmad traveled to Southeast Asia under the instruction of Šāliḥ b. ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAṭṭās, the holy man of the ʿAmd valley whose biography is the book's subject. The instruction came after Aḥmad complained about his financial hardship to Šāliḥ. "Go to Java, and you will find your affairs there righteous and your needs fulfilled," the saint told the distraught Aḥmad (al-ʿAṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 516: vol. 2, 515).

In Southeast Asia, Aḥmad became a successful merchant. His trading activity took him to the eastern islands of the Indonesian archipelago (al-ʿAṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 516). In Parepare, a city off of the southwest coast of Sulawesi, Aḥmad met a Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAydārūs Bilfaqīh (d.?) who had settled there for years. That encounter was transformative for Aḥmad, and he decided to learn the teachings of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya (al-ʿAṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 516). After studying with Bilfaqīh, Aḥmad went to Sumenep on the island of Madura to seek a Ḥaḍramī ascetic, ʿUmar b. Ḥasan Bāhārūn (d.?). Whilst living in Sumenep, he periodically traveled to Surabaya to learn from the aforementioned Sufi-scholar Shaykh b. Aḥmad Bāfaqīh. Shortly before his death, Bāfaqīh appointed Aḥmad as a master of the Ṭarīqa ʿAlawiyya. Aḥmad then moved to Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and settled in the Arab quarter of Pekojan. With his accrued wealth, he was able to build a *zāwiya* (Sufi center), completed in 1876 (al-ʿAṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 523). He devoted most of his time to the *zāwiya*, worshipping and teaching his fellow Ḥaḍramīs. Gradually, he became known among the Ḥaḍramīs as a miracle-working saint. Tales of the saintly miracles (*karāma*) associated with him circulated not only in Southeast Asia but also in the Ḥaḍramawt through the returning migrants. One year before his death in 1886, Aḥmad decided to return to his homeland. The migrant who left his homeland to seek fortune returned as a recognized Sufi-scholar and miracle-working saint. Sufi-scholars and students in the Ḥaḍramawt flocked to his gatherings. When he died, his body was buried inside Šāliḥ's mausoleum, a place of honor reserved for the few, next to the grave of the very saint who first directed him to Southeast Asia.

Aḥmad's itinerary, like those of his Ḥaḍramī teachers in Southeast Asia, constitutes an exception to the dominant negative portrayals of migration, and of Southeast Asia, discussed earlier. In these itineraries, Southeast Asia is more than just a worldly destination. After all, it was in Southeast Asia, not in the Ḥaḍramawt or the Hejaz, that Aḥmad experienced spiritual

conversion, studied, and became a Sufi master. While Aḥmad returned to the Ḥaḍramawt, he left behind physical traces that marked his transfigured itinerary in the form of a *zāwiya*. Aḥmad's *zāwiya* complemented other emerging spiritually significant places in Southeast Asia associated with the Ḥaḍramīs like the mausoleum of his teacher Shaykh b. Aḥmad Bāfaqīh in Surabaya, the older shrine of the eighteenth-century Ḥaḍramī saint Ḥusayn b. Abū Bakr al-'Aydārūs (d. c. 1796) in Batavia (Kaptein 2002), and the shrine of Nūḥ b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī (d. 1866) in Singapore (Mandal 2012; Sevea 2017). The *zāwiya* at the heart of Batavia is, in turn, linked to a shrine in the 'Amd valley where Aḥmad lies buried next to a major Ḥaḍramī saint. Long before its inscription in the *Tāj al-ā'rās*, the story of Aḥmad and his *zāwiya* in Batavia have already circulated among Ḥaḍramīs in Southeast Asia and the Ḥaḍramawt. Such a narrative prefigures an alternative imaginative geography of Southeast Asia, one that coexisted and competed with that conjured up by tales of rags to riches. In and through such stories, a Ḥaḍramī geography of sanctity that prominently features Southeast Asia began to take shape.

Slices of Ḥaḍramawt

By the late nineteenth century, the Ḥaḍramī diasporic community in Southeast Asia was significantly larger than in the days when Aḥmad arrived. The unstable political condition in the Ḥaḍramawt and the decrease in transportation costs following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the advent of direct steamer lines between Singapore and Aden resulted in a significant increase in Ḥaḍramī migration to Southeast Asia. In Java alone, the Ḥaḍramī population rose from 6,133 in 1860 to 18,051 in 1900 (Berg [1886] 1989: 69–70; Mandal 2018: 66). By 1900, the Arab population of the entire Dutch East Indies had increased to around 27,000 (Jonge 1997: 94). More and more Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars migrated to the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya, and settled in localities with significant Ḥaḍramī diasporic population. Among them were notable figures whose lives and works are immortalized in the *Tāj al-ā'rās*, including Muḥammad b. 'Aydārūs al-Ḥabashī (d. 1919) in Purwakarta, West Java (vol. 2, 184–92); Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Miḥḍār (d. 1926) in Bondowoso, East Java (vol. 2, 467–93); Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās (d. 1929) in Pekalongan, Central Java (vol. 2, 310–25); and 'Abdallāh b. Muḥsin al-'Aṭṭās (d. 1933) in Bogor, West Java (vol. 2, 41–54). As space does not permit a thorough treatment of each of these figures, I have extrapolated several key themes evident in their biographies, all of which contributed to the emergence of a Ḥaḍramī geography of sanctity in Southeast Asia.

The *Tāj al-ā'rās* presents these individuals as arriving in Southeast Asia as Sufi-scholars. Unlike Aḥmad, discussed in the last section, they came to Southeast Asia after long years of study in the Ḥaḍramawt and the Hejaz. They settled in different cities with substantial Ḥaḍramī diasporic communities and worked to establish centers of Islamic learning, whether in the form of mosques, *zāwiyas*, or schools. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī and 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās founded their own mosques in Jatiwangi and Bogor, West Java, respectively. Muḥammad al-Miḥḍār established the Khayriyya school in Surabaya, while Aḥmad al-'Aṭṭās founded the Salafiyya school and a *zāwiya* in Pekalongan, Central Java. Meant for the children of the Ḥaḍramī migrants, these schools used Arabic as the language of instruction. In cultivating their communities, these scholars relied either on their own money – as some of them engaged in business – or on the financial support of the Ḥaḍramī mercantile elites.

Aside from establishing centers of Islamic learning, these scholars instituted Sufi rituals associated with the Ṭarīqa 'Alawiyya that have been observed in the Ḥaḍramawt. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī, for example, introduced the ritual of reciting the Prophet's Nativity Story (*mawlid*) every last Thursday of the month of Rabī' I (al-'Aṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 179). This ritual was

first instituted by his teacher 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī (d. 1912) in Say'ūn, Ḥaḍramawt (Boxberger 2002: 161). To date, this annual ritual is synchronously observed in Say'ūn, Jakarta, and on the island of Lamu in Kenya (Bang 2003: 149). Al-Ḥabashī also inaugurated the first Ḥaḍramī saintly commemoration (*ḥawl*) in Southeast Asia to honor the memory of a Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar, Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād (d. 1899), who died in Tegal, Central Java, during his visit to Southeast Asia (al-'Aṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 337–340). Another ritual instituted by these Sufi scholars in Southeast Asia is the annual recitation of al-Bukhārī's anthology of Prophetic *ḥadīths*. All through the Islamic month of Rajab, these Ḥaḍramī scholars lead this ritual recitation in their respective congregational centers, just as it has been observed in the cities of the Ḥaḍramawt.

The activities of these Sufi-scholars made Southeast Asia into an intellectually thriving region for Ḥaḍramīs. News of their activities reached the Ḥaḍramawt and the Hejaz as these Sufi-scholars kept active correspondence with their peers in those regions. As a result, Southeast Asia began to emerge as an educational destination for many aspiring Ḥaḍramī scholars. Thus 'Alawī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād (d. 1953) and his brother Ḥusayn (d. 1955) traveled to Southeast Asia in 1911 to study from the aforementioned Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars. Both, in turn, became established scholars in Bogor (West Java) and Jombang (East Java) respectively (al-'Aṭṭās 1979: vol. 2: 340–379). 'Alawī b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād (d. 1962) also traveled from the Ḥaḍramawt to continue his study under these Sufi-scholars and ended up becoming the grand *mufī* of the Sultanate of Johor in Malaya (al-Mashhūr 1991: vol. 2, 133–6). The author of the *Tāj al-ā'rās* is another example. As previously mentioned, he traveled to the Dutch East Indies in 1910 to seek Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars after studying in the Ḥaḍramawt and Mecca. Not all who traveled to Southeast Asia ended up staying. 'Umar b. Aḥmad Bāfaqīh (d. 1939) traveled to Southeast Asia in 1899 and studied with 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās in Bogor, Aḥmad al-'Aṭṭās in Pekalongan, and Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī in Tegal, before returning to the Ḥaḍramawt (Bāfaqīh 1990: 81–85). Later in his life, Bāfaqīh composed a book, entitled *Ṣilat al-akhyār bi-l-rijāl al-a'immat al-kibār* (*Ties of the Virtuous with the Great Imams*) that lists his teachers and spiritual mentors in the Ḥaḍramawt, the Hejaz, India, and Southeast Asia. Like the *Tāj al-ā'rās*, this book defies the center-periphery paradigm, presenting instead a geography of sanctity with multiple centers across the Indian Ocean (Bāfaqīh 1990). Aḥmad Mashhūr b. Ṭāhā al-Ḥaddād (d. 1995), who became an eminent scholar and preacher in East Africa, also spent several years studying under Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Java, among others with the aforementioned 'Alawī b. Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād and 'Alawī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād (al-Ḥaddād 2003: 27). Whilst in Java, he also attended the classes of Muḥammad al-Miḥḍār (Bondowoso), 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās (Bogor), and Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad al-Saqqāf (Gresik) (al-Ḥaddād 2003: 273).

Among these “international students” who continued their education in Southeast Asia were those who came from the Hejaz, like the Meccan Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Faḍ'ak (d. 1980) and the Medinan Muḥammad al-'Azb (d.?), both of whom studied with 'Abdallāh b. Muḥsin al-'Aṭṭās in Bogor (West Java) for several years before returning to Arabia. Faḍ'ak rose to become the religious advisor to Faisal (d. 1933), the son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca. When Faisal became the king of Iraq in 1921, Faḍ'ak went with him to Baghdad and stayed there for seven years before returning to Mecca where he became one of the leading scholars of the holy city (al-'Aṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 681). Not all who studied with the Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Southeast Asia, however, came from abroad. There were many who were born to Ḥaḍramī fathers in Southeast Asia. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥabashī (d. 1969) was born in Batavia and studied with the locally born Ḥaḍramī scholar 'Uthmān b. 'Abdallāh Bin Yaḥyā (d. 1914). He then continued his education in the Ḥaḍramawt and the Hejaz. Interestingly, when he returned to Southeast Asia, he studied more advanced Sufi texts with 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās in Bogor, Muḥammad al-Miḥḍār in Bondowoso, and Aḥmad al-'Aṭṭās in Pekalongan. He subsequently became a famous

Indonesian preacher and established a reputable Islamic center in the neighborhood of Kwitang (Jakarta) (Alatas 2011). While it is often assumed that students from Southeast Asia commence their education in their homeland before going for more advanced studies in the Hejaz or the Ḥaḍramawt, the cases that have just been discussed suggest that the reverse could also be equally true.

The centers of Islamic learning established by Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Southeast Asia gradually emerged as nodes in an expanding Ḥaḍramī geography of sanctity whose significance are recognized by the Sufi-scholars of the Ḥaḍramawt. These places became destinations for pious visitations among scholars from the Ḥaḍramawt and elsewhere. Thus, the eminent scholar of Ḥaḍramawt ‘Alawī b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mashhūr (d. 1922) traveled to Java in 1893 and 1910 to visit the centers established by his compatriots there (al-Mashhūr 1991: vol. 1, 90). Similarly, Aḥmad b. Abū Bakr Bin Sumayṭ (d. 1925), a Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar born in the Comoros in 1861 who rose to become one of the chief *qāḍīs* of Zanzibar under the British-Bū Sa‘īdī state, also traveled to Java sometimes between 1886–1888 (Bang 2003: 90). Many of these Sufi-scholarly visitors, like Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad al-Miḥḍār (d. 1955) – whose aforementioned father, Aḥmad, disparaged Southeast Asia – praised the places he visited in Java as spiritually significant sites while linking them to similar sites in the Ḥaḍramawt. Praising the al-Nūr mosque built by ‘Abdallāh al-‘Aṭṭās in Bogor, he wrote:

Fortunate is Bogor, for established therein today
Tranquil meadows akin to the Garden of Pleasure (*jannāt al-na‘īm*)
A great mosque, none in the horizons comparable
To it in beauty and structure.
Dazzling light shines above, brilliant as the morning sun.
The al-Nūr mosque, a *qif’a* of Tarīm.

al-Ḥaddād n.d.: 93

Here, al-Miḥḍār dubbed the mosque as a *qif’a* of Tarīm, the city in Ḥaḍramawt where the founder of the Ṭarīqa ‘Alawīyya and most of the Bā ‘Alawī saints are buried. The term *qif’a* can mean a slice, a piece, a fragment, or a patch of land. Similar link-making can be seen in the poem composed by the Ḥaḍramī jurist Muḥammad b. ‘Awaḍ Bā Faḍl (d. 1950) when he visited the shrine of Aḥmad al-‘Aṭṭās in Pekalongan. The poem, now framed and hung on the wall inside the mausoleum, states:

O luminous mausoleum, worthy of praise
Thou contain the grave of the pious one,
Whose similitude no eyes have ever witnessed
Truly he was the best in austerity and piety,
Who has traversed the finest life story.
He, the son of Ṭālib al-‘Aṭṭās, a pure and clean soul
Aḥmad, the reviver of the *sunna*, a real treasure
Say to those who visit this tomb: You are the best flock.
Felicitous are those who visit it,
to honor the rising light from the beam of the aiding sun [the Prophet],
Allāh’s blessings upon him and his family, the best of all lineages.

Beneath the poem is a chronographic phrase that dates the mausoleum’s construction, also composed by Bā Faḍl. The phrase states: “and it [the mausoleum] is a *qif’a* of Ḥurayḍa,” referring



Figure 15.1 Pilgrims visiting the tomb of Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh al-'Aṭṭās in Pekalongan, Central Java. Photo by Ismail Alatas.

to the sanctuary settlement established by, and the burial site of the Ḥaḍramī saint 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Aṭṭās (d. 1661) in the Ḥaḍramawt.

Symbolic links between places in Java and the Ḥaḍramawt were not only drawn by travelers from the Ḥaḍramawt like al-Miḥḍār and Bā Faḍl. Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars who migrated to Java and established centers of Islamic learning were also involved in practices of link-making. A prominent example of this is the al-Riyāḍ mosque in Solo (Central Java) built by 'Alawī b. 'Alī al-Ḥabashī (d. 1955). 'Alawī was the son of the celebrated Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar and poet 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī (d. 1912), the founder of the al-Riyāḍ mosque and school in the city of Say'ūn, Ḥaḍramawt (Freitag 2003: 278–283). After the death of his father, 'Alawī migrated to Solo and built his own mosque, which bears the same name as that of his father. At the base of the mosque's minaret, 'Alawī inscribed a poem written in 1888 by his father to mark the opening of the al-Riyāḍ mosque in Say'ūn:

These are the meadows (*riyāḍ*), and these are the streams,
Flowing, for the dwellers to drink their sweetness.
Those who settle therein acquire their goals.
Those who visit attain their desires.
A mosque built on sound foundations,
Thus, its effects clearly visible.
(al-Ḥabashī n.d.: 206)

‘Alawī added an extra chronographic verse to the original poem that gives the date of the mosque’s opening, 1355AH (1937):

A mosque softened with knowledge and deeds,
Thus, its radiance clearly visible.

The name al-Riyāḍ, together with the presence of a poem inscribed in a spot visible to anyone entering the compound link the mosque in Java to that in Say’ūn. When ‘Alawī died in 1955, he was buried within the compound of the mosque, turning it into a pilgrimage destination. Every year, the death of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī is commemorated at his mausoleum in Say’ūn and in the al-Riyāḍ mosque in Solo (al-‘Aṭṭās 1979: vol. 2, 177–178). The al-Riyāḍ in Solo, however, is not the only *qif’a* of the al-Riyāḍ in Say’ūn. In 1901, a Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholar from Kenya also built an al-Riyāḍ mosque on the island of Lamu modeled on the one in Say’ūn. Al-Ḥabashī’s poem quoted above is also inscribed in the entrance to the al-Riyāḍ in Lamu (Bang 2003: 144). It is clear, therefore, that the al-Riyāḍ mosques in Solo and Lamu are envisioned as *qif’as* of Say’ūn. Toponymic duplication, as Sheldon Pollock observes in the case of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, becomes a way to reconfigure spaces that have been excluded from a particular imaginative geography to allow for their inclusion. “Space in the cosmopolitan sphere was infinitely fungible,” Pollock writes, “with multiple exemplars of the



Figure 15.2 The minaret of Masjid al-Riyāḍ built by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī in Say’ūn, Ḥaḍramawt. Photo by Ismail Alatas.

same mountains, rivers, and regions” (Pollock 2006: 235–236). It would be inaccurate to characterize these more recent sites as branches of an original center. The logic that informed this cosmopolitan practice assumes the possibility for the creation of multiple centers that are clearly linked to one another without the hierarchical presupposition that characterizes the relationship between a center and its branches. Perhaps the term *qīʿa*, commonly used by Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars to characterize these sites, is more useful to think with as it implies that the new centers are of the same substance as the original. These centers are imagined as autonomous spatial extensions, or duplication, of a historically prior entity rather than branches (*furūʿ*) or peripheral satellites that are dependent on or controlled by it.

Geography of sanctity

The presence of the migrating Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars turned Southeast Asia into a prominent destination for Ḥaḍramīs seeking to further their spiritual education or for Sufi-scholars from elsewhere to reconnect with their peers. These Sufi-scholarly migrants were revered by their fellow Ḥaḍramīs, both in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, in their lifetimes. When they died, mausoleums were built on top of their graves, and annual commemorations (*hawl*) were held, usually organized by their children and disciples. The sons of these scholars, usually the eldest, took over the leadership of the community and act as surrogates (*al-qāʾim bi-l-maqām*) of their saintly fathers. They continued the endeavors of their fathers and worked to maintain ritual regularity. The fact that these surrogates were born in Southeast Asia meant that they spoke the local language and are more familiar with their localities compared to their migrant fathers. Owing to the work of these surrogates, the religious communities that were initially cultivated by their fathers to cater to their fellow Ḥaḍramī migrants gradually became more attuned to the broader Indonesian public. Over the course of the twentieth century, an increasing number of non-Ḥaḍramī Indonesians became part of these religious communities. Today, the majority of those who attend the annual commemorations of these Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars are non-Ḥaḍramīs (Alatas 2014).

The presence of pilgrims from the Ḥaḍramawt and other Middle Eastern countries in these annual commemorations has also become a regular feature. While most of these international pilgrims are Ḥaḍramīs, there are also non-Ḥaḍramīs who have studied under Ḥaḍramī scholars in the Ḥaḍramawt or elsewhere. Take Gordon, for example. Gordon is a Scottish Muslim convert from Glasgow whom I met during the annual commemoration of ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Ḥabashī in Solo in 2012. Following his conversion to Islam, Gordon studied in Tarīm, Ḥaḍramawt with the contemporary Sufi-scholar ‘Umar b. Muḥammad Bin Ḥafīẓ (b. 1962) (Knysh 2001). There he was initiated into the Ṭarīqa ‘Alawiyya and became acquainted with the history of Ḥaḍramī saints across the Indian Ocean, including Southeast Asia. It was in Ḥaḍramawt that Gordon first encountered the *Tāj al-āʾrās*. The role of texts like the *Tāj al-āʾrās* is important in familiarizing Gordon with places in Southeast Asia. After all, in the *Tāj al-āʾrās*, Southeast Asia is presented as a natural extension of the spiritually significant Ḥaḍramawt; a place where one can visit sites and attend ritual gatherings linked to the “friends of God.” When I asked Gordon whether he considered Java a periphery of the Muslim world, he responded, rather rhetorically: “how can a place with a significant number of Prophetic inheritors be considered a periphery?” I would like to think that Gordon’s response would satisfy the author of the *Tāj al-āʾrās*.

Conclusion

Java, and by extension Southeast Asia, has been persistently relegated as an Islamic periphery, whether by scholars whose treatments of Islamic history are admirably more capacious than

their predecessors and peers to include Southeast Asia (Hodgson 1974; Lapidus 2014), or by those who observe and portray Muslims in Southeast Asia as being not Islamic enough (Geertz 1968). While more recent works have tried to document the enduring historical interconnections between Southeast Asia and the Middle East – some even focusing on Southeast Asian scholars in the Middle East (Bradley 2016; Bruinessen 1995; Laffan 2011; a much earlier work on this dynamic is Snouck Hurgronje [1880] 2007) – they ultimately, and inadvertently perhaps, remain wedded to the center–periphery geographic paradigm. Destabilizing this entrenched geographic paradigm requires the work of uncovering and re-centering Southeast Asian Islamic voices and discourses that authoritatively contest the privileging of the Middle Eastern “center” (Alatas 2021; Formichi 2020). It also demands the work of tracing Islamic moral itineraries that exhibit different directionality, not only those that move *to*, but also *from* the Hejaz or other parts of the Middle East. Observing the itineraries of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars and their students, as I have attempted to do in this chapter, is one way to do so (in this volume, Kooria and Graves also trace alternative networks of religious authority and devotion, respectively, across the Indian Ocean).

In this chapter, I use the itineraries of Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars in Southeast Asia to highlight how flows and movements of people do not simply point to interconnections. More than that, movements also involve “the recarving of channels and the remapping of the possibilities of geography” (Tsing 2000: 327) that may destabilize existing center–periphery paradigms. Mobile actors are not simply travelers in an already constituted geography. They also build sites, channels, and infrastructures of transmission and create new nodes and centers where different itineraries may intersect. Some are cartographers who chart their own map featuring sites and places deemed noteworthy, while drawing linkages and affinities between them. Spatial affinities can, of course, narrow, expand, and narrow again (Cooper 2005: 109). They require constant maintenance and works. Performed over time by different actors, these concrete labors may generate stable imaginative geography that may capture the minds of some, but not others. After all, Muslims have envisioned and traversed different Islamic imaginative geographies (Ricci 2011; Soares 2005; Taylor 1999; Thum 2014; see also Tschacher, this volume). These geographies coexist and often compete with one another, and each cannot be reduced to another.

Looking at these coexisting Islamic imaginative geographies allows us to refuse an overarching center–periphery frame. While ideas of center–periphery certainly exist among Muslims, they are not necessarily useful analytical categories. Such ideas are simply one among many Islamic imaginative geographies present among Muslims. Using them analytically risks being trapped in the very discursive structure that needs to be analyzed. Instead of naturalizing a particular Islamic imaginative geography, we should attend to the processes that conjure an imagined geography. Turning to the social and cultural processes through which imaginative geography emerges and come to count allows us to see a variety of contingent material and imaginative labor performed by different actors.

By tracing the changing perspective of Java from worldly to educational and pilgrimage destination among Ḥaḍramī Sufi-scholars, this chapter accentuates the roles of both mobility and mobilization in remaking geography, albeit without necessarily determining success. The successful landscape-making discussed in this chapter does not mean that every such attempt will have positive outcomes. Imaginative geography may fail to take shape, let alone mobilize, notwithstanding actors’ persistent efforts. A once vivid imaginative geography may, over time, lose its mobilizing sway (Green 2011; Grehan 2014; Yasin 2009). In short, imaginative geography is a sociological achievement, an outcome of contingent processes. How it came to be, for whom such an imaginary is targeted, to whom it appeals to, and what mechanism of

seduction at work, are all important questions to explore. Studying how a “peripheral” region like Southeast Asia becomes religiously central to some people from elsewhere may thus help us think about similar processes that have continued to sustain the religious significance of the so-called “central lands” of Islam without falling into their ideological grips.

Note

- 1 In this chapter I use the term “Sufi-scholar” to refer to those trained as scholars in Islamic law and theology who are also Sufi mystics and belong to a Sufi order. The hyphenated term is meant to bridge across the commonly perceived dichotomy between “legalist scholars” and “Sufi mystics.”

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16

SACRED SPACES AND THE MAKING OF SUFISM IN SRI LANKA¹

Between violence and piety

Merin Shobhana Xavier

Sri Lankan Islam maintains a peripheral position not only in the discourse of Islamic Studies, but further still in the imaginary of South Asian studies. Despite its nominal treatment in these broader epistemic academic communities, geographically Sri Lanka has played a prominent historical, cultural, economic, and cosmological role for Muslims in the Indian Ocean world and its vast networks (for a discussion of Islam across Southern Asia see also Tschacher, this volume). Many of the traditions that have formed around Sarandib, as the Arabs referred to the island, or Ceylon as it was known during colonial times, may be traced back to a *hadith* that relies that India (*al-Hind*) broadly, and Sarandib/Ceylon specifically, was the land that the first human being and prophetic patriarch Adam was expelled to, upon his banishment from paradise (Ricci 2019).²

Ronit Ricci has detailed how this island was not only strategically central to the various trading and religious networks that emerged across the Indian Ocean (one that connected the Arab world to the Southeast Asian archipelago), but it was also conceived as a site of “exile” and “banishment.” Like Adam, Muslims from Dutch-controlled Southeast Asia (usually referred to as “Malays”) were also banished to Sarandib. Thus, this island historically was simultaneously both the center of Islamic South Asian sacred geography, and the “furthest” land for many Muslims from across the Indian Ocean. On each and both accounts pilgrims, traders, and all sorts of travelers came to its shores. These diverse forms of mobilities served as “technologies of transmission,” and eventually led to the development of many complex Islamic networks on, across, and through, Sri Lanka (Blackburn and Feener 2019: 6). This chapter examines one specific type of Islamic network that emerged in Sarandib and its continued contemporary legacies, specifically that of Sufi shrines (shrines as pilgrimage sites are also discussed in this volume by Shanazarova, Ruffle, Arjana, and Alatas).

Sufi Shrines as a lens for the study of Islam in Sri Lanka

In this chapter I locate Sufi shrines in the tumultuous landscape of Sri Lanka’s tense history and ongoing “violence-striven polity” (Hasbullah and Korf 2013: 32), but I push beyond this otherwise limiting view of shrines as only sites of contestations. Following Vivek Taneja, Sufi shrines

in Sri Lanka are examples of agentic sites that exist at the nexus of deep historicity, memory, piety, and gender dynamics.

Saintly graves are thus spaces of complex interplay between the historical and the sacral. These are spaces where communities are formed, people's everyday troubles are recounted, rituals are elaborated and transmitted, family genealogies are recorded, and stories are told. They are also spaces of connection to the spirits and the memories of the sacred dead.

Taneja 2018: 26

In the case of Sri Lanka, then, Sufi shrines are sites of political and ethno-nationalistic violence and theological dissonance, while also being spaces that contain sacral agency, religious pluralism, and gender inclusion. This line of inquiry is meant to complement the “interiority” of Sufism with exterior structural and systematic modes that define them (De Munck and Manoharan 2019: 2), rather than challenge scholarship that has ethnographically engaged Sufism as an “interior” practice.

Within this approach, then, the first half of this chapter maps three major nodes in the broader pilgrimage routes of Sri Lanka, which include Adam's Peak, Dafther Jailani, and Kataragama. Drawing from oral traditions associated with these spaces, I highlight their negotiated positions *vis-à-vis* other religious groups, and on the central figures of Sufi devotionism across Sri Lanka. The second half shifts to two examples of regionalized shrines, specifically those of Payvilan in Kattankutty (in the eastern province of Batticaloa) and Hussein Bee Bee in Slave Island (located in the capital city of Colombo). By shifting my attention away from popular Sufi pilgrimage sites to local spaces, I capture the oscillating tensions between violence and piety that Sufi shrines in Sri Lanka are embedded within, and the intricate ways these tensions unfold throughout the contemporary landscape. Additionally, the case of the shrine of Hussein Bee Bee allows for a reflection on gender, and the role of women Sufi saints and piety. My own broader research centers on contemporary lived legacies of Sufi spaces and geographies, and takes an ethnographic, rather than a historical and/or textual, approach, though I have gleaned heavily from historical and textual studies of Sufism in South Asia, especially in Sri Lanka (Blackburn and Feener 2019; Tschacher 2019). Though oral narratives and hagiographies that inform sacred spaces and devotional practices may not provide historical evidence in the way that archival research may, I still find generative insights to religious worlds and imaginations in these oral traditions (Stewart 2019; see Shanazarova's contribution in this volume).

Mosques across the island have also traditionally been graves to Sufi saints, but many of these spaces have either slowly disappeared, or – as it has become the norm in several South Asian contexts – these are being actively purged by “anti-Sufis.” Besides tensions internal to the Muslim community, which hinge on theological polemics that differently orient the relationship of Islam to Sufism – primarily the contestation over the veneration and role of saints (*‘awliya allah*) – in Sri Lanka, the active erasure of Sufi shrines is unfolding also due to the framing of Sufi shrines as Muslim ethnic and political territories that threaten the Buddhist hegemony on the island, and its purity as a sacred island (for a reflection on sacred spaces in Southeast Asia, see Arjana, this volume).

Contextualizing the political and social milieu of Sri Lanka

The modern nation state of Sri Lanka is one that has been defined by a deep pre- and post-colonial history of ethno-linguistic and religious strife. A central pestering concern that primed

the formation of the postcolonial modern nation state was the question of the particularities of territorial and political rights of the three ethnic and linguistic communities that composed the state. Numerically, the majority status is held by the Sinhalese Buddhists, while of the minority groups that make-up the island, the largest are Tamils, who tend to be a mix of Hindus and Christians. In contrast to the former two ethnic groups, who are marked by their linguistic identities, Muslims, or Ceylon Moors, in Sri Lanka, are identified *vis-à-vis* their religion. Muslims speak Tamil and, at times, Sinhalese, but are marked as an ethnic category via their religious identity. However, Muslims, as an ethnic block, maintained an ambivalent position throughout Sri Lanka's history, such as during the civil war, and have since continued to embody a precarious status in the broader imagination of the nation state in the twenty-first century (McGilvray and Raheem 2007).

For instance, the island's complex ethno-linguistic contestations led to a civil war between the majoritarian Buddhist government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who sought Tamil territorial and political rights. During the civil war, the minority Tamils looked to the Muslims to join in their fight for self-determination, because the LTTE saw its identity as Tamil first and foremost and Muslims speak Tamil. On the other hand, Sinhala Buddhists tried to garner support from Muslims to dispel the emerging militancy of the LTTE. However, the LTTE did not easily move past the lack of uniform Muslim support nor did they ignore the rumors that Muslims were secretly working with the state against the Tamils. Eventually, the LTTE turned on Muslims too. On August 3, 1990, 140 Muslims praying at Husseiniya mosque in Kattankudy were killed by the LTTE, and nine days later, another 122 Muslims were killed in Eravur. Shortly, thereafter, in October 1990, the LTTE forcibly expelled all Muslims from the northern province of Jaffna (around 75,000), some were exiled into internally displaced camps across the country, where many still live to this day (Thiranagama 2011).

With the end of the civil war in 2009 and the defeat of the LTTE, it is the Muslim community that has emerged as the new threat and scapegoat across the island. This is evident in the rise of anti-Muslim hostility and violence, especially in digital and social media spheres, which have been inspired by the rhetoric of Buddhist extremist groups, such as Bodu Bala Sena ("Buddhist Strength Force" or BBS) who have deployed violent anti-Muslim discourse akin to Islamophobic rhetoric found in global western contexts; namely the narrative of Muslims as terrorists who are taking over the island by overpopulating and excelling economically, and even actively sterilizing non-Muslims (Xavier and Amarasingam 2016: 33–35; Mihlar 2019; McGilvray 2016; Amarasingam and Rizwie 2020). Such vitriol and hate speech have led to communal violence against Muslim communities. These have included the destruction of a Muslim shrine in Anuradhapura, which culminated with riots in Aluthgama in June 2014 (Haniffa 2016).³ Most recently, the April 2019 Easter attacks claimed by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and enacted by local Sri Lankan Muslim supporters led to mass backlash against Muslim communities and caused a social media shut down by the government as a result of growing hate speech and violence towards Muslims (Haniffa 2019; Amarasingam and Rizwie 2020). The diverse history and the presence of Muslims on the island is regularly marginalized in the political and social narrative of Sri Lanka, which has been focused on the complex historical realities of civil war and communal violence.

The community of Ceylon Moors represents about 9.3% of the island's population and are ethnically and religiously diverse (Mihlar 2019: 2154). Though the community is composed predominately of Sunni Muslims, it also includes some Shi'as; there are also Muslims of Malay descent that date back to the era of Dutch rule, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Haniffa 2008: 351; Rasiah 2019; Ricci 2019; McGilvray 2016). Despite their presence on the island for well over a millennium, Muslims' claims to indigeneity have not been deemed

authentic, as they are still considered foreigners, especially by those expounding a Buddhist nationalistic rhetoric that frames Muslims as Arab and Persian outsiders or “invaders.” Hence, an examination of the history of sacred spaces on the island is one generative modality in which to understand the ways in which Sarandib and Lanka have maintained a popular imaginary in the South Asian Islamic milieu, one that has led to the emergence of prominent Sufi spaces, networks, and ritual pieties, amidst tensions and opposition to the very historical and contemporary presence of Muslims on the island. The latter story is dependent on the most essential pilgrimage node on the island, Adam’s Peak.

The shared sacred geographies of Sarandib

Adam’s Peak

Ronit Ricci maps how the traditions of Adam’s fall to Sarandib – discussed by the chronicler al-Tabari (d. 923), the Arab historian and geographer al-Mas’udi (d. 956), and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) among many – all included variations of the narrative of Adam’s fall, either to *al-Hind* (generally in India) or Sarandib, on a mountain; conversely, Eve is usually said to have fallen in Jeddah (Ricci 2019: 125–148). Al-Biruni seemed to hold that Adam was not exiled to the mountain of Rahun, but rather elsewhere and ultimately saw the mountain as an important “lighthouse” for sailors, while further wondering about where Sarandib actually was (McKinley 2018: 203–204). It is with the ninth-century merchant Sulaymān al-Tajir and his account, collected upon his return from India and China (around 850), that one begins to see a reference to “ar-Rahoun” as a name for this mountain:

...chief of all these islands they call the *diva*. In its coast there are pearl fisheries, and it is completely surrounded by the sea. On its soil is a mountain called ar-Rahoun on which Adam fell – salvation be upon him! – The trace of his foot on the rock is seen on the summit of this mountain, the imprinted hollow in stone. At the top of that mountain we see only one foot marked because it is said that, Adam, – salvation be upon him! – put the other in the sea; it is said that the footprint at the top of this mountain is about seventy cubits. Around this mountain abound stones; ruby, topaz, and sapphires.

quoted in McKinley 2018: 199

In his study of Adam’s Peak, Alexander McKinley captures how the “figural space” of Sarandib as the site of Adam’s exile (generally referred to as al-Nudh, or India) overtime became a “literal space” (Sarandib, ar-Rahoun, and Adam’s Peak), largely because in the ninth and tenth centuries travelers followed the mythological narrations about Adam and the potential heavenly gems (2018: 198). The most popular pilgrimage account of Adam’s Peak is found in the travelogues of the North African jurist ibn Battuta (b. 1304). Describing his pilgrimage to the mountain, he writes:

The mountain of Sarandib is one of the highest in the world. We saw it from the sea when we were nine days’ journey away, and when we climbed it we saw the clouds below us, shutting out our view of its base. On it there are many evergreen trees and flowers of various colours, including a red rose as big as the palm of a hand. There are two tracks on the mountain leading to the Foot, one called Bábá track and the other Mámá track, meaning Adam and Eve. The Mámá track is easy and is the route

by which the pilgrims return, but anyone who goes by that way is not considered by them to have made the pilgrimage at all. The Bábá track is difficult and stiff climbing. There are ten such chains, two at the foot of the hill by the “threshold”... From the tenth chain to the grotto of Khidr is seven miles...At the grotto of Khidr the pilgrims leave their belongings and ascend thence for two miles to the summit of the mountain where the Foot is. The blessed Footprint, the Foot of our father Adam, is on a lofty black rock in a wide plateau.

quoted Gibb 1929: 258–259⁴

Ibn Battuta goes on to describe the presence of a diverse array of devotees, and his own encounters with the “darwishes” and “Yogis” (Gibb 1929: 259). He even explains that he visited the mosque of “Shaykh ‘Othmán of Shiráz, known as Sháwush” outside the town, adding that “...The Sultan and inhabitants of the town visit his grave and venerate him. He was the guide to the Foot,” suggesting further the presence of popular pilgrimage and Muslim devotion, one that in our modern discourse may be framed as transregional in scope (quoted in Gibb 1929: 256; McKinley 2018: 213). By ibn Battuta’s time, then, the Peak was already a significant node in the Indian Ocean world with linkages to other regions of the Muslim world, such as Persia.

This tradition of Adam’s expulsion to Sarandib was further solidified by Muslim scholars from the subcontinent, including the poet Amir Khusraw Dihlawi (d. 1325) and Ghulam Ali of Bilgram (or Azad, his pen name) (1704–1786). In his Arabic treatise, *Subhat al-marjān fi āthār Hindūstān* (“The Coral Rosary of Indian Antiquities”) (1764), Azad writes that Adam’s Peak is second in holiness only to Mecca (Ernst 1995: 556–557). Accordingly, then, Ernst writes:

India was the site of the first revelation, the first mosque on earth, and the place from which pilgrimage to Mecca was first performed. Using the Sufi mystical concept of Muhammad’s primordial prophetic nature, Āzād described India as the place where the eternal light of Muhammad first manifested in Adam, whereas Arabia is where it found its final expression in the physical form of the Prophet.

Ernst 1995: 557

In his discussion of Adam’s Peak, Azad also captures some of the experiences of pilgrims who journeyed to the mountain. He relays that one such traveler expressed the following:

He told me, “I made pilgrimage to the footprint of Adam (peace be upon him) and I circumambulated that place.” A group of Madārī darvīshes had lived there for some time, attending the sacred footprint and accepting donations made to it. They have a leader to whom they are related, Shaykh Badī‘ al-Dīn Qutb al-Madār [“Master Wonder of the Faith, Axis of Orientation”] (may God illuminate his tomb), one of the greatest and most famous saints of India...The rulers of Ceylon today are Hindus who revere the blessed footprint and honor its pilgrims.

quoted in Ernst 1995: 560

These textual sources understand Adam’s Peak as existing in India broadly, and at times conflate India (al-Hind) with Ceylon. These early examples of pilgrimages and associated mythologies from Muslim writers capture the significance of Adam’s Peak as a central node in the Indian Oceanic world, and its broader networks to the west and east, from where it attracted diverse religious pilgrims, travelers, and traders. Early pilgrimage practices to spaces like Adam’s Peak

signal to the site's "capacious" and "accommodating" religious tendencies, which is not often seen today (de Silva 2016: 18).

Adam's Peak is prominent in narratives from across Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist communities. Hindus hold that the footprint at the summit of the mountain belongs to Shiva (hence *Shivanoli Malai* or Shiva's Mountain), Christians – like Muslims – hold it to be Adam's footprint, while Buddhists hold the footprint to be the Buddha's. The path up the mountain contains numerous shrines to Hindu and Buddhist deities, but the footprint itself is encased in a Buddhist temple or Sri Pada Temple on Mount Samanala. Geographically, this region consists of tropical forests and thus it is understood to be "protected" by the god Saman, the caretaker of Sri Pada, according to Buddhist understanding (McKinley 2018: 294). Today, the long hike up the steps of the mountain is popular amongst tourists, but less and less so among non-Buddhists. The Muslim presence has lessened on these paths, mostly due to the harassment they experienced, which in many ways counters the narratives found in ibn Battuta's travelogue as described above. Further, the contestation of the ownership of this sacred site is held not only across various religious communities, but is also internal to the Buddhist community, as the management of the Sri Pada temple between "lay élites and Buddhist monks, and among them" highlights the tensions that exist across the diversity of users in a pilgrimage site (de Silva 2016: 18–19; McKinley 2018).

The early journeys to Adam's Peak led to the expansion of Sufi spatial networks in Sri Lanka, however. Two significant sites emerged over time that geographically and imaginatively linked to Adam's Peak, namely Dafther Jailani – a hermitage cave complex associated to the twelfth-century Baghdadi Sufi saint, Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) – and then Kataragama, dedicated to the perennial mystic of Islam, Khidr, in southern Sri Lanka.

Dafther Jailani

Popular Tamil Muslim tradition holds that al-Jilani sojourned in Sarandib after his visit to Adam's Peak and meditated in a cave hermitage in the mountainous jungles of Balangoda (according to some for 12 years), before travelling, mystically, to the Ka'ba in Mecca. These traditions are of course based on hagiographies, and there is no evidence to suggest that al-Jilani actually visited Ceylon or South India, though the Qadiri order is the most widespread and popular form of loosely molded Sufi lineage found in Sri Lanka and southern India (Schomburg 2003). According to some scholarship, the official order formerly dates back to the eighteenth century (Tschacher 2019: 78–79). Over time, this hermitage site came to include cave mosques and numerous tombs to Sufi saints (women and men, most of whose names have now been lost), some of which have since been removed (see more below). As a result, numerous other seekers have also visited and/or are associated with this hermitage site, including the south Indian Sufi saint Shahul Hamid of Nagoor (d. 1579) and the mystical figure Khidr (McGilvray 2016: 63). Historically, many pilgrims walked from Adam's Peak to Dafther Jailani as part of their pilgrimage.

During an interview with the hereditary trustee of Dafther Jailani, Roshan Aboosally, in the summer of 2018 in Colombo, she narrated to me the oral tradition that surrounds the formation of the site: a Sufi travelled from Lakshadweep Islands (India's Coral Islands off the coast of Kerala) and pointed out the significance of this site. So, a mosque was built here in 1922. During the construction of the mosque, a tombstone to a Sufi mendicant, Darvesh Muhiyadeen of Yemen, was discovered, which is now the main *ziyaram* or tomb in the complex. Aboosally is a Colombo lawyer by profession who inherited the office of chief trusteeship of Dafther Jailani from her father M. L. M. Aboosally (McGilvray 2016: 71). Her father, the

former chief trustee, self-published their family history and stories of Dafther Jailani in a book entitled *Dafther Jailany: A Brief Account of the Dafther Jailany Rock Cave Mosque in Balangoda, Sri Lanka* (2002).

The annual *kanturi* (or *kandoori*), or the ‘*urs* (death anniversary celebration of a Sufi saint) for al-Jilani attracts numerous pilgrims, Sufis (especially dervishes, known locally as *bawas*), and visitors to this popular site (McGilvray 2004; 2016; for another discussion of a ‘*urs* in Southern Asia, see Graves in this volume). *Bawas* or *faqirs*, mostly those affiliated with the Rifa‘i tradition, frequent these holy festivals, and participate in rituals, including those of self-mortification with swords. Flag hoisting is another common practice seen during ‘*urs* and *mawlid*s (birthday celebrations for the Prophet Muhammad and al-Jilani) at Sufi-Islamic spaces across Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2004; De Munck and Manoharan 2019). Flag hoisting festivals are common in Sri Lanka, but also in southern India or Tamil Nadu regions, across different religious traditions (Saheb 1998). The recently published *The Line of Lanka: Myths and Memories of an Island* by Sunela Jayewardene (2017), which features a chapter on Dafther Jailani, has resulted in new popular interest in this space.

Like Adam’s Peak, this site has also been a space of contestation beginning in the 1970s, primarily between Buddhist and Sufi communities. Buddhist narrative holds that Kuragala (as it is known to Buddhists, in Sinhala meaning “hollow rock”) was an ancient hermitage site based on the discovery of Brahmi inscriptions and drop ledges in the early twentieth century. This site then is heavily politicized, as archaeology, an irrefutable science, was used by some Buddhists to lay claims of ownership to the space (McGilvray 2016: 67–70; McKinley and Xavier forthcoming). During my visit to Dafther Jailani in 2013, for instance, I encountered the military dismantling many of the buildings at the shrine complex, the mosque cave to Khidr, and some Sufi tombs.⁵ They explained to me that they were completing “archaeological” work, even showing me some animal ruins (likely some monkey bones) that they found near the entrance to the remaining open-air mosque. Many women and their children sat around the rubble and remains of the demolished buildings, unphased by the tense military presence. When I asked the local community member who was guiding me during my visit why there was no outcry from the broader Muslim community, he explained that many Muslims in Sri Lanka tend to be anti-Sufis and do not care about such spaces. I returned again in 2016 with a colleague and found no military or “archaeologists” present on site, though new plaques were installed in Tamil, Sinhala, and English, deeming the site as an archaeological space.

Further adding to these territorial contestations is another layer that intersects with both theology and questions of gendered authority. In recent years, Aboosally has received resistance from Muslim communities in Colombo whose organizations are led by men, not only because she is a woman and a hereditary Muslim authority, but also because of Dafther Jailani’s Sufi significance. This site, then, has received double negative attention: first from Buddhist fundamentalist groups who see it as threatening Sri Lanka’s Buddhist nation-state hegemony and seek to reclaim the site as their own. And, second, from Muslims who challenge Aboosally as a woman *and* Sufi leader. Still, despite these challenges, she has continued to maintain her spiritual, political, and legal authority over this significant Sufi shrine.

Kataragama

The maintenance of fragile and delicate intimacy of shared sacred spaces is further evident in the final major Sufi shrine complex under examination here. Located in southeastern Sri Lanka, Kataragama is held by Hindus as the site where Skanda, the son of Shiva, visited and met Valli Amma, an indigenous (Vedda) princess. It stands as another important pilgrimage spot shared

by numerous religious communities on the island, though Buddhist presence and piety has become dominant in the late twentieth century (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 163–199; Sunil 2007). Sinhala Buddhists view Skanda as “one of their gods who will eventually become a Buddha” and who can help contend with “practical” matters; Hindus, on the other hand, hold that Skanda can help with human beings’ practical needs as well as salvation, which leads to various acts of devotion (*bhakti*), such as fire-walking (Obeyesekere 1978: 458). As suggested by Gananath Obeyesekere, “Kataragama, then is a meeting place of pragmatic Buddhist religiosity and Hindu *bhakti* devotionism” (1978: 458). The god Skanda has come to “attract many forms and modes of religiosity,” one being that he is a form of Murugan, or the “beautiful one,” while another way in which Skanda has also been understood is through the figure of Khidr, the perennial mystic and prophet of Islam (Obeyesekere 1978: 468–469).

Though not named, tradition has come to understand the mysterious figure that Musa/Moses encounters in the Qur’an in *surah al-kaḥf* (18:65–82) as Khidr (Khizr). In this story an unnamed servant commits what Musa understands as several egregious acts, only later to learn the true intentions behind them, which was known only to the mysterious figure because of their access to true knowledge (*maʿrifā*). This figure then comes to represent and model the *shaykh* (master) or *murshid* (teacher), which is the central institutional authority in Sufi traditions (Halman 2013). In his travelogue, ibn Battuta wrote that Adam’s Peak also maintained a space dedicated to Khidr, but to date, I have yet to find any other reference to a shrine to Khidr at Adam’s Peak, while shrine complexes like Dafther Jailani and Kataragama seem to be the main sites that maintain devotional practices and spatial mythologies that link to Khidr. The story of Khidr at Kataragama also seems to have developed early in the nineteenth century, where the site was associated with Sufis, and a shelter was built, while some oral traditions suggest that Muslim association to this sacred space is at least 300 years old (Krishnapillai 2017: 121; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 164).

Embedded between the broader Yala Wildlife Sanctuary and Lunugamwehera National Park is Katharagama Sanctuaries, which is now a popular tourist destination with resorts and wildlife attraction, and within which the town of Kataragama is embedded. When I visited Kataragama for the first time in June 2018, the pilgrimage season had begun for Hindus and Buddhists, and many others, who had started walking. For some, this process could take about two weeks to complete. As I walked towards the large complex landscape, the outside area of the Kataragama main sanctuary was full of vendors selling various offerings, such as platters of fruits and flowers to gift to the various gods and goddesses. We walked over a small river (Manik Ganga), where some pilgrims – and even elephants! – were sitting or bathing. After crossing the river, one arrives upon the large grounds which contain the various major and minor shrines and temples, mainly Hindu and Buddhist ones. The first temple one encounters is dedicated to Valli; immediately next to it, is the mosque-shrine complex to Khidr and other Sufi saints (see Figure 16.1), including a tomb for Palkudibawa.

The white and green walls clearly demarcated a space that was different from the Buddhist and Hindu temples that surrounded it. “This is the *kalima*,” explained the guide who met us inside; this is what protects the shrine. The writings on the wall included English, Tamil, and Sinhala and highlighted the religio-linguistic pluralism of this sub-space within the larger Kataragama grounds. Within this multi-dimensional sub-space, we found two main Sufi tombs, several mosque spaces, flag poles, a *madrasa*, *majlis*, and a small building with a fountain, believed to be the fountain of life. According to some oral tradition, it was here that Khidr and Musa met, as per Qur’anic tradition. Historically there was also reputedly a mosque built to Khidr (15 by 15 feet, which no one knows the exact location of anymore) (Hassan 1968). There is also the *maqam* (tomb) to Khidr, which was locked. The plaque outside this building dated it to 1986.



Figure 16.1 Entrance to Kataragama Mosque and Shrine. Photo by Merin Shobhana Xavier.

One of the main tombs in this complex is to Palkudibawa (Kesopuri Swami), a milk-drinking wandering mendicant (a *bawa*), whose pictures and slippers are housed in a separate Buddhist/Hindu temple in the Kataragama grounds that we would visit after. According to local narratives, when the land was yet to be cleared, the holy figure resided in the jungle, and there was a cow that would regularly go into this jungle and come back. One day, the villagers followed the cow to see why it was doing this, and they found this *bawa*, and that is how he received his name. It is held that this *bawa* belonged to the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim traditions. During my time at this shrine, a Buddhist monk came with his entourage, and stood in front of the tomb and prayed, while placing some coins in the till box. The fluidity of this shared space, so strongly marked by the presence of a saffron-robed Buddhist monk praying at a Sufi shrine, even suspended my own sense of understanding inter-religious interaction in an island like Sri Lanka, where stories of communal violence are far too common.

Many of the Sufi shrines, such as Dafther Jailani and Kataragama, are spaces that ebb and flow, changing architecturally overtime. New tombs are added or destroyed (as we saw at Dafther Jailani) while maintenance and upkeep remain ongoing issues. For instance, the Kataragama complex was revered for the water fountain of life, historically deemed the most important feature of this site, but it was run down and locked up when I visited. Similar to Dafther Jailani, the shrine complex in Kataragama also hosts yearly festivals, when *bawas* come, such as during *mawlid*s.

Overall, Kataragama's shrine complex to Khidr and various other Sufi saints remains unique, as it is embedded within a larger sacred geography that houses spaces vital to Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Movements in and out of these spaces are fluid amongst devotees and pilgrims.

Kataragama's location in southwestern Sri Lanka (away from the conflict-ridden northern and central regions) capture how regionalism delicately informs the inter-religious devotionism across Sufi spaces. I did not notice this tendency at Adam's Peak, where popular tourism has grown, but Buddhist iconography and sacred shrines are dominant *vis-à-vis* a Muslim presence that has become almost non-existent; Dafther Jailani, though known as a Sufi hermitage complex, is facing Buddhist claims to an established Muslim sacred geography, while Kataragama's mosque-shrine complex is a sub-complex embedded in a larger sacred geography that is shared by Hindus and now Buddhists. Many of the island's regionalized shrines, two of which I turn to now, contain even more delicate complexities due in part to their local positionalities within dominant Muslim regions, which mean that they are then sites of intra-communal violence as well.

Contestation and negotiation at local Sufi shrines

In Sri Lanka, the global realities of Sufi and Islamic religiosity are situated in an island context, embedded in both a history of Islamic (and other) imaginations of cosmology and geographically-defined piety – as evident in the legacies of sacred spaces such as Adam's Peak, Dafther Jailani, and Kataragama – and recent conflicts. Notably, these conflicts are not limited to inter-religious violence, but also intra-Muslim tensions. Extant interpretative divergences have been exacerbated by new waves of “purification” of Islam among the minoritized and marginalized Muslims of post-war Sri Lanka. This transformation has been led by returnee migrant workers from the Gulf States (Gamburd 2009; Haniffa 2008; Klem 2011) and *da'wa* movements, be they Jamaat-e-Islami, Tablighi Jamaat, or Towheed Jamat (McGilvray 2016: 72; Klem 2011; Hasbullah and Korf 2013). Such shifts in approaches to Islam have been particularly noted in Kattankudy, in the eastern province of the island, where new schools (*madrasa*) have opened, particularly led by those who have returned from studying in Saudi Arabia, while the Muslim businesses maintain transnational and economic ties to Arab countries (for parallel development in Southeast Asia, see Arjana in this volume). These modern economic and missionary shifts have further led to a new precarity of Sufi shrines in Sri Lanka, as captured in one such incident in 2006. In addition, as I explore in the second case study here below, there is also another reality at risk in these sites, and that is one of the loss of gendered piety.

The case of Payvilan and the violence of anti-Sufism

In Kattankudy, located in the eastern shore of Sri Lanka, a region heavily populated by Muslims, one finds the community of M. S. M. Abdullah (nickname “Payilvan,” as he was a wrestler) from Maruthammunai, who are members of the All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliheen. This particular community began facing vitriol due to the perceived controversial teachings of their leader, Payilvan, which stressed the transcendence of Islamic ritual practices for spiritual actualization, and perhaps even pantheism. Payilvan's teaching resulted in a *fatwa* against his community, by the All Ceylon Jamiathul Ulama on September 10, 1989 (Council of Islamic Scholars), deeming the community and its members “apostates” (Hasbullah and Korf 2013: 38; Schwartz and Al-Alawi 2019). Many of Payilvan's writings are accessible in English, as they have been widely published, for instance, *Holy Quran's Judgement: Part 1* (2012). In 1996, they opened a meditation center in Kattankudy, which immediately drew violent attacks, and was eventually burned down in 2004, resulting in some charges and arrests against the perpetrators (Schwartz and Al-Alawi 2019).

With the death of Payvilan things took a turn for the worse, however there seems to be differing reports on what happened shortly after his death on December 6, 2006 and subsequent burial on the mosque and meditation center grounds. One report suggests that it was the body of an exhumed member of this Sufi community who had been interred instead (Schwartz and Al-Alawi 2019), while others (including one of my own interlocutors, the current caretaker of All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliheen), explained that it was the burial of Payvilan that was protested by anti-Sufis (as he was deemed an apostate), with his body exhumed and thrown on the road. This exhumation then resulted in the burning of houses and the forced dispersal of hundreds of families associated with this community from their homes (Hasbullah and Korf 2013: 38–39). In a turn of events, the violence led to state intervention, with a decision by the Supreme Court that required the permanent placement of a police Special Task Force outside this community for their protection (though others say that the local police did not actively stop some of this violence earlier on, either). It was only upon state and legal intervention that members of this community returned to this center and their homes. The body of their teacher was interred, now behind a glass wall. The meditation center also includes a large white and green minaret, that has further elicited rebuke. Anti-Sufi Muslims in the area have tried to forcibly remove it, since they do not consider members of the community Muslims, and thus should not be allowed to have a minaret.

Sitting on the shoreline, enclosed by fencing, the place was still guarded by security cameras and police officers in non-uniform, when I visited in July of 2018. Though numerous Sufi shrines exist in various mosque spaces in and around the Batticaloa region, the growing presence of Salafi tendencies has caused an increased tension in this region between Sufis and non-Sufis.⁶ I was told that members of this small community continue to receive verbal assaults, however their location on the coastal line on the outskirts of the city has helped in some ways, as they are not based in the core of the bustling city. During my conversation with the caretaker, he explained that this space is not necessarily a mosque or a *dargah*, though two tombs, one to Payvilan and the other to his wife, can be found inside. The community itself has ongoing internal divisions, as right across from the meditation center is a smaller building with those who have splintered off over differing theological understandings of Payvilan's status, whom – according to the caretaker – the splintered group understand as god. Even in this example one can see the continued legacies of violence that is maintained in and around spaces that contain the internment of holy figures associated with Sufism.

The patron saint of Slave Island: Hussein Bee Bee

Slave Island in Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka, received its name during Dutch colonial rule as it served as the slave quarters (Wahab-Salman 2015; Wickramasinghe 2020). This neighborhood reflects the legacies of rich historical transregional networks, as shown for instance by the Malay Military Mosque (Java Lane Mosque) and the Wekanda Jummah *Masjid*. The land for this latter mosque is said to have been purchased in 1786 by Pandan Bali, a Javanese nobleman and exile (Wahab-Salman 2015). Whereas the Wekanda Jummah *Masjid*, a Shafi mosque, was constructed in 1786, local narratives – documented in the pamphlet that I was given by the security guard during my visit in 2018 – highlight how the tomb of the woman saint buried there was “discovered” in 1875, under thick vegetation. At the time, apparently, the main imam (the *katheeb*) Noordeen Tayif Latiff, had asked for the land to be cleared, and in the course of this endeavor they discovered a tombstone. One of the inscriptions indicated that this was the grave of a “Pathan” (likely referring to Patani, a region of the northern Malay Peninsula) woman by the name of Hussein Bee Bee. The *katheeb* then set up a fence and cleaned the place.

Days later, a Tamil woman, who was cutting grass near the grave, saw a cow in the pains of labour. She went to help it, but a voice exclaimed from the grave not to touch it. When the woman heard this, she fell to the ground scared, but then the calf was safely delivered. Many hagiographies of this nature are then associated with this site to the woman Sufi saint of Malay descent, Hussein Bee Bee.

The small green *mazar* (shrine) dedicated to Hussein Bee Bee sits opposite a large complex that includes a mosque, offices, and also a school (see Figure 16.2). The *mazar* has separate women and men's sections, and, interestingly, the tomb is situated in the women's section, while the men's section has a window through which they can view the tomb. When I asked about these separate spaces, the security guard who was helping me and my research assistant explained that men and women are able to enter through the women's sections, it is only on special commemorations that there might be gender segregation, and usually it is men who go to the separate area. This shrine attracts men and women, including young married couples and parents with children who seek cures for their children. *Mawlid*s, such as for al-Jilani or Prophet Muhammad, are celebrated here with flag hoisting as well, as noted in other spaces above.

The tradition of Sufi shrines to women across Sri Lanka is one that has received no scholarly attention, though stories of gendered piety and Sufi shrines to women exist (on Central Asia, see Shanazarova). In my own documentation of Sufi shrines across the island, I have found several Sufi shrines from north to east that are said to belong to women, but their stories and names are lost. Often my interlocutors in the field were not able to relay more information than that an unmarked tomb is known to belong to women. In other instances, such shrines to women (real or imagined) play a metaphysical role but are also sites of theological



Figure 16.2 Tomb of Hussein Bee Bee. Photo by Merin Shobhana Xavier.

contestation. For instance, M. R. Bawa Muhaiyadeen (d. 1986), a Tamil Sufi teacher who established a transnational movement between Sri Lanka and America, built a *masjid-mazar* complex dedicated to Maryam, the mother of Isa (Jesus), on Kayts/Velanai Island, a small island in northern Jaffna, based on his teaching that Maryam came to Sri Lanka after the death of Jesus (Xavier 2018: 141–145). Disciples of Bawa built a memorial tomb for Maryam based on Bawa's teaching. This memorial tomb was removed in 2016 due to ongoing internal conflicts within the community about the nature of this teaching by Bawa Muhaiyadeen, but also due to concerns of popular piety that was being performed around the shrine by Muslims and non-Muslims alike (i.e., Hindus), and which was deemed heretical. These practices included the veneration of the tomb and lighting incense or oil lamps.

The role of women in Sufi traditions has been well documented in other regions of Asia, but has not received much attention in the study of Sufism in Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2014). In South Asia, the study of Sufi leaders who are women has highlighted women's presence in ritual spaces and activities, or as leaders in their own right, as evident in the example of Roshan Aboosally, discussed above (see also Bellamy 2011; Pemberton 2000; 2004; Flueckiger 2006; Schimmel 1997; Ruffle 2011; Abbas 2002). Kelly Pemberton's work calls attention to the role of women as "ritual specialist" in the South Asian context, especially as they take place at Sufi shrines, but one that has not gone without criticism:

Although centuries-old debates over the nature of these ritual activities have never been settled among Sufis, or between Sufis and their critics, Sufism itself has really been condemned wholesale by those who decry its contemporary manifestations. Within the framework of devotion to Sufi saints, however, women's ritual activities have, more often than not, been regarded as problematic.

2004: 4

Women, both in premodern and modern times, are often presented as existing at the "periphery of Sufi activities" and not at the center (Küçük 2015: 115). Women's bodies in Sufism have been valorized, and at times weaponized, as a means to ascertain the legitimacy of Sufism itself, and its relationship to Islam. Despite the historical amnesia that prompts this discussion, it is a question that nevertheless continues to persist today. Shrines have been formidable spaces of access for Sufi women, lower-class women, transgender people, and everyday women, who themselves have tended to be buried in such spaces attracting further veneration from Muslim and non-Muslim adherents. Still, shrine visitation, especially to local shrines by variously positioned women, is "a ritual practice simultaneously suspect and beloved," as "Men tend to frequent larger, more important shrines that are considered formally legitimate by religious authorities. Women predominate at small, back-street shrines, often ramshackle sanctuaries of doubtful antecedents, mocked by men" (Bettridge 1993: 227). As is the case at other shrines, Sufi shrines in Sri Lanka have a particular legacy of gendered presence, be it the internment of holy women or the devotional piety performed by women across Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian communities, who at times are unable to enter temples or mosques because of their gender. An analysis of Sufi shrine cultures in Sri Lanka then captures these important gendered authority and expressions, which are so easily neglected.

Conclusion

After the Easter bombings of 2019, which were claimed by ISIS supporters in Sri Lanka, the landscape of Islam on the island shifted once again. Rumors spread in the Sri Lankan

intelligence world that supposed “Wahhabis” were planning on attacking a Sufi shrine, though this attempt was reputedly thwarted. In the process, there has emerged a new fascinating rhetoric wherein Sufis were presented as the “good Muslims” against radical Muslims. A few months after the bombings, the Supreme Council of Sufi Tariqa (SCOT) held a conference at Dewatagaha of Sheikh Usman Waliyuallah mosque and Sufi shrine in Cinnamon Gardens, which included attendance by officials from the government. The discourse at this gathering positioned Wahhabis against the good Muslims, the Sufis, who were presented as the solution to “fundamentalism” and “terrorism” in Sri Lanka (“Muslims in SL Follow Traditional Teachings” 2019).

This rhetoric then follows the logics seen so often in the global west, wherein Sufis are located as the good Muslims and the “antidote” to Islamic radicalism, but this rhetoric lands curiously in the context of Sri Lanka, where the island has seen repeated instances of violence both at the national and communal level, across and within religious communities. Sufis and Sufi spaces were often caught in the crossfire, while stories of Sufi women are marginalized or purged altogether, especially during moments of growing revivalism and anti-Sufi sentiments that see ritual life of Sufi shrines as heretical. Now, for the first time, Sufism is being embraced by the state as a means to curb anxieties of growing Islamic fundamentalism.

Such reality brings us to the complex nexus of Sufi shrines and Islam at the core of this chapter’s discussion. Sufi shrines remain a central site of veneration and activity for women, and not only for Muslims, but also Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, thus cultivating a religious pluralism that Sufis have often been associated with. Though Sufi shrines and pilgrimages have a long history in Sri Lanka, the civil war and post-war communal violence have led to a particular precarity for Sufi shrines and communities who engage them, due to the rise of anti-Muslim hostility, and thus have also been spaces of violence and erasure. Sufi shrines and their networks reflect valuable insights to the history and contemporary realities of Sri Lankan Islam, which comes to be defined by a multiplicity of ritual expressions, gendered accessibility and authority, anti-Muslim and anti-Sufi violence, as well as transregional networks that link them across the Indian Ocean (Arab, Persian, and Malay worlds). As such, the broader positioning of Sarandib’s geography as both center (cosmologically) and periphery (as a site of banishment) is a generative framework that also mirrors the locations of Sufi shrines and Sufism in Sri Lanka today.

Notes

- 1 I dedicate this chapter to Dr. Hasbullah Shahul (Sri Lanka), who died suddenly in late 2018. His support of my research on Sufi shrines was energizing and exciting, and so deeply missed.
- 2 As Ronit Ricci (2019) has explained, this island in the Indian Ocean has had many names over its long and complex history. For instance, aside from Sarandib and Ceylon, Lanka was also a common referent, as it is the name that appears in the Hindu epic of *Ramayana*, where Sita is kidnapped to. Sri Lanka is the name that emerged as the island defined itself as a modern nation-state after its independence. Since this discussion is engaging primarily with contemporary ethnographic research completed from 2011 to 2018, I use Sri Lanka throughout my discussion. If I am engaging with historical material, such as primary textual sources, I employ Sarandib or Ceylon accordingly.
- 3 For media coverage of this incident, see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-14926002> (Accessed October 14, 2020).
- 4 There have been various travelogues written on Adam’s Peak, subsequently, such as by R. H. Bassett in his book *Romantic Ceylon: Its History, Legend and Story* (1926), which includes a chapter on Adam’s Peak.
- 5 Pictures of the Kuragala Holy Site Demolition.” *Colombo Telegraph*, May 17, 2013. <https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/pictures-of-the-kuragala-islam-holy-site-demolition/> Accessed December 13, 2020.

6 More news media coverage on this incident, please see the following: <https://www.muslimworldtoday.org/the-wahhabi-invasion-of-sri-lanka> Accessed December 12, 2020.

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MUSLIM INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIA, CHINA, AND IMPERIAL JAPAN

Kelly A. Hammond

The story of the Japanese Empire's deepening involvement with Muslims in China and Central Asia, starting in the late nineteenth century, is not very well known. Until recently, the majority of scholarship written in English regarding the Japanese Empire's interest in Islam dismissed the motives of the Japanese government and military as uncoordinated, haphazard, and nefarious. But, like all other imperial powers operating in the region, such as Russia and Great Britain, it is clear that the Japanese Empire paid close attention to Islam and Muslims that could be used to foment dissent among the minority populations who occupied China's vast northern borderlands spanning from the Pacific to the Pamir Mountains.¹

Drawing on recent works in English and Japanese, this chapter contextualizes the development and implementation of Japan's Islamic policies in China and throughout Central Asia. It also explores the impact of imperial Japan's efforts to mobilize Muslim communities throughout the region. After providing a historical overview of imperial Japan's burgeoning interest in Islam starting after the Meiji Restoration (1868), the chapter will focus on Japanese individuals who traveled to China and Central Asia to study and learn about Islam. It will also provide an overview of the educational associations and university departments that were established in order to collect data and publish research about Muslims. These associations became important in the lead up to World War II, as many of them came under the purview of the Japanese Imperial Army.

The second section will focus on Tokyo as a locus for diasporic anti-imperial Muslims. For example, a large community of Volga Tatars made their way to Tokyo after the Russian Revolution in 1917 and were naturalized by the Japanese government. They became important for imperial Japan's outreach efforts to anticommunist Muslims around the world. The third section will focus on ways that the Japanese Empire facilitated movement and interaction between various Muslim communities from China and Central Asia in the years leading up to World War II. For instance, in 1938 the Japanese Government sponsored a *hajj* pilgrimage for five Muslims from China. On their journey, they met and interacted with Muslims in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Arabia, and East Africa. Upon their return, the Japanese sent their first official diplomatic mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to try to secure an oil concession, but the British and the Americans intervened. Finally, the last section will place Afghanistan within the scope of Japan's imperial ambitions to highlight their far-reaching imperial aspirations.

Overall, Japan's interest in Islam and Muslims was instrumental to the management of the Japanese Empire. The transnational networks of Muslims which were established and maintained with the support of the Japanese Empire presented a viable alternative to Soviet communism or western imperialism, and, in turn, provide us with new insights into the management of the Japanese Empire at home and abroad, and more broadly the importance of engaging and leveraging Muslims to the political ends of non-Muslim governments (on the interaction between Muslim communities and non-Muslim states see Schluessel's and Morgenstein Fuerst's chapters in this volume).

Placing Muslims into the story of the Japanese Empire

Bringing together the histories of imperial Japan and Muslims is a relatively recent historiographical interjection. There has, of course, been much written about this topic in Japanese for a number of years, but Japanese academics write almost exclusively in Japanese, thus limiting the exposure of their important historical discoveries and inquiries. These scholars include – but are not limited to – Matsumoto Masumi, Ando Junichiro, Shimada Daisuke, and Misawa Nobuo. Collectively, they have made inroads into finding accessible historical sources and understanding Japan's wartime interest in Islam.

The recent turn towards global and transnational histories presented an opportunity for scholars to place the Japanese imperial project in a wider perspective (Ambaras 2018; McDonald 2017; Yellen 2019; Young 2014). Academics also began to focus on non-Japanese subjects, such as Koreans, Chinese living in Manchukuo, and Okinawans or the *Burakumin* (a caste of “untouchables” who perform jobs like tanning and undertaking) in Japan. These peoples found themselves not only as subjects of the Japanese Empire but also as objects of colonial study (Bayliss 2013; Moon 2013). At the same time, scholars of Modern China have questioned narratives that present ethnic minorities who now find themselves as citizens of the People's Republic of China as an indelible part of the Chinese nation or as having participated willingly in twentieth-century projects of nation and state building on the Chinese mainland (Atwill 2018; Hammond 2020; Weiner 2020).

It is in this intellectual milieu that this current chapter situates itself: a transnational history that attempts to bring into question some of the enduring narratives about the formation of both the Japanese Empire and the modern Chinese nation-state. These efforts are important for the comparative study of empire and for understanding the ways that Islam has been politicized by Muslim and non-Muslim actors in the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century: Beginnings of a new relationship

Before the late nineteenth century, there was likely minimal interactions between Japanese subjects and Muslims. The first known references to Islam in Japanese sources appear in Arai Hakuseki's early eighteenth-century tome, *Seiyō Kibun* (*The record of things about the West*), and while individual travelers might have come into contact with Muslims, knowledge about them was likely minimal (Krämer 2014: 621). Ideas about “religion” as we understand the concept today and its relationship to the state were also only introduced to Japan in the mid-nineteenth century. It was Commodore Perry who brought the English word “religion” to the island when he presented a letter to the Tokugawa Government in Edo Bay demanding trade and treaty status from the *shōgun*. In Japanese, the word for religion is *shūkyō*. It is a neologism, imported and adapted from Chinese, and only came into common practice in the 1870s (Josephson Ananda 2012: 1–10). It is quite clear that general knowledge about Islam would have been very limited in Japan until the late nineteenth century.

In 1879, more than ten years after the Meiji Restoration, the new Japanese Government was eager to learn about the world beyond East Asia. They sent an unofficial envoy led by Yoshida Masaharu to meet with the Qajar Court in Persia and the Ottoman Court in Constantinople. When Yoshida returned from this mission, he published a book called “Expedition to the Islamic World” (J. *kaikyō tanken*). These visits to the Qajar and Ottoman courts are generally considered by historians to be the beginning of diplomatic relations between imperial Japan and the two predominantly Muslim empires in Asia (Esenbel 2011; Esenbel 2017: 6–7). As Japan began its diplomatic engagement in an increasingly globalized and mobile world, intellectuals and academics started developing more of an interest in Islam. The first place Japanese scholars came into contact and learned about Muslims was on the Chinese mainland China (Galambos and Kitsudō 2012: 113–34; Galambos 2015: 33–61; Noda 2017: 21–29). These interactions between Japanese intellectuals and Muslims living throughout China’s borderlands would inform much of the research for the first-generation academics and bureaucrats with an interest in Islam (Esenbel 2004: 1140–1170).

In the late nineteenth century, a number of Japanese men converted to Islam. Most learned about Islam through their connections to Muslims on the Chinese mainland after spending time there serving in the army. After the defeat of the Qing in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), imperial Japan started to expand their influence on the Chinese mainland. Some of these men had connections to the infamous Black Dragon Society (J. *kokuryūkai*), which was an ultranationalist paramilitary organization with loose connections to the Japanese Army. Beyond political machinations, the Black Dragons also collected intelligence along the Sino-Russian border. Others, like Noda Shōtarō (1868–1904), converted while teaching at foreign military academies. The first known Japanese *hajji* was Yamaoka Kotaro, who traveled around the Eurasian continent after the Russo-Japanese War (Misawa 2011: 119–122).

In his travels, Yamaoka met Abdürreşid İbrahim, a Volga Tatar who eventually sought exile in Japan because of his resistance to the Bolsheviks around the Black Sea. Yamaoka invited İbrahim to Japan in 1908. There, the two men worked together to promote Islam in the imperial capital. İbrahim did not come alone, and a large group of Volga Tatars made their way overland through Siberia to resettle in Japan after the Bolshevik Revolution. The community was naturalized by the Japanese government. The Tatar community in Tokyo served two important purposes for Japanese propagandists leading up to the war: they were able to demonstrate their support for Islam while simultaneously promoting anti-Soviet sentiment (Yamazaki (née Unno) 2014: 405–420; Brandenburg 2018: 143–172; Komatsu 2018: 145–154; Krämer 2014: 622–623; Levent 2011: 307–325). During this time, Yamaoka converted to Islam.

As interest in Islam on the Japanese home islands began to increase, a number of translations from European-language sources of books about Islam began to appear. In 1920, Sakamoto Kenichi was the first to translate the Qur’an into Japanese with European-language sources, and by the outbreak of World War II there were a number of different translations of the Qur’an in circulation in Japan. However, Omar Mita’s translation of the Qur’an, which was published in 1972, is often considered the first “true” translation because it was rendered from Arabic by a Muslim (Krämer 2014: 619–621).

The twentieth century: Pre-Manchukuo and post-Manchukuo

There are two distinct phases in Japan’s interest in Muslims living in Central Asia and China: pre-establishment of Manchukuo and post-establishment of Manchukuo. After their victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), imperial Japan received a large section of railway on mainland China from the Russians. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, imperial Japan continued

to increase their influence over parts of the Chinese mainland and what is now North and South Korea. They annexed Korea in 1910 and then issued the Twenty-One Demands to the new Republican Government in 1915 while the world was distracted by World War I. If the Chinese Government had accepted these demands, they would have essentially ceded sovereignty of North China to the Japanese Empire. Then, in 1931, the Japanese Kwantung Army based in Manchuria used a staged bombing of a section of railway in North China as a pretext to invade and occupy the region. In March 1932, the Japanese Army established a client-state, known as Manchukuo. The legitimacy of Manchukuo was contested by the League of Nations, and in 1933, Japan left the League because the majority of the international community would not recognize Manchukuo as a sovereign nation-state.

As the Japanese Empire strengthened its foothold in China, they also increased outreach to Muslim communities on the mainland. But, after the establishment of the client state of Manchukuo, the interests of the Japanese Imperial Army and Japanese scholars of Islam became more closely aligned. By the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Japan had a systematic Islamic policy which aimed to integrate Muslims into their empire (Ando 2003: 22, 28–29; Rezrazi 1987: 89–112). Before this, there had been a number of individual Japanese, such as Fukuda Kikuo, who moved to China independently to work among Muslim communities. For example, Fukuda opened a school for Muslim youth and was also a vocal advocate for the creation of an independent Muslim state in North China (Ando 2003: 26). But these individual efforts were haphazard and not very well coordinated. By the 1930s, the interests of individuals and organizations who wanted to pursue a more overt and integrated Islamic policy began to align more closely with Japanese imperial policymakers and militarists who understood the geopolitical importance of North China, Central Asia, and Xinjiang to their overall imperial ambitions (Hammond 2020: 31–68).

At the same time, imperial Japan was increasingly concerned with Soviet Communism. In order to combat their largest perceived threat on the mainland, they entered into the anti-Comintern Pact with the Nazis in 1936. One of the conditions of the pact was that the Nazis would recognize Manchukuo. Having already recognized Manchukuo as a sovereign state in 1934 as part of its negotiations with Japan concerning the invasion of Ethiopia, Fascist Italy joined the anti-Comintern Pact in 1937. In part, this anti-Communist angle helped the Japanese bureaucrats interested in Islam in Central Asia and China push forward their agendas. As more and more religious organizations and associations came under more direct control of the army throughout China's borderlands, many stated that their primary objectives were to create a Greater East Asia and to resist Soviet expansion at all costs (Duara 2001: 99–130).

The three main Axis Powers – Germany, Italy, and Japan – were latecomers to the scramble for colonial possessions and saw themselves as “have-not” countries because of their lack of natural resources and scarcity of land (Mimura 2011: 109). They had come together out of their mutual distrust for the Soviet Union and fear of the spread of communism, but they also shared a concern about the domination of global markets by countries like the United States and Great Britain. This meant that Japanese bureaucrats working in the service of empire looked to people living throughout the colonized world as potential customers in their efforts to destabilize these markets. In Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, the majority of these people were Muslims. Starting in their experimental colony – Manchukuo – Japanese “techno-fascists” worked extra hard to not only create a space for Japanese settlers to move and thrive, but to understand the people who had come under their direct control (Mimura 2011: 4). This was done through the collection of massive amounts of data gathered through surveys. It resulted in the publication of many books, journal articles, pamphlets, and dossiers about Muslims written and compiled by Japanese scholars of Islam starting in the 1920s.

As Japanese academics started paying more attention to Islam, many of the research institutes and academic departments devoted to the study of Muslims came under the control of the Japanese Government in a much more direct way. By the mid-1930s, Japanese bureaucrats and scholars of Islam were conducting surveys in Chinese Muslim schools, guilds, and other spaces in order to gauge how the Japanese Empire could promote their support for Islam to Muslims around the world. Muslims in China are also a large and diverse group with many different political inclinations. For some, the Japanese Empire offered an alternative path that was neither in line with the Chinese Communist Party or with the Chinese Nationalist Party. Other Muslims living in China's vast borderlands hedged their bets with the Soviets. Rather than see the Muslim community in China as a cohesive whole, it is best to understand that many of these groups had their own reform agendas in mind and worked with different political backers – including the Japanese Empire – to attempt to bring about changes that suited the needs of their individual communities (Hammond 2020: 69–75).

One of the first associations devoted to studying Islam was the Tokyo Islamic Group, which was founded in 1925. Two years later, the Tokyo Islamic School was founded. By the mid-1930s, there were a number of different Islamic Associations spread out in large cities like Kobe and Nagoya (Tanada 2012: 85–106). In 1932, renowned scholar of Islam Kobayashi Hajime founded the Islamic Culture Study Group at Komazawa University in Tokyo. During this time, the interests of the most important coordinators of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies in Japan, like Matsuda Hisao (1903–1982), Kobayashi Hajime (c. 1890–1963), and Ōkubo Kōji (1899–1950) saw their own interests in promoting the history of Islam and Islamic theology line up with a growing interest by the Japanese Empire to instrumentalize Islam and Muslims in new ways (Suzuki 2007: 196).

After 1937, two other major Islamic research institutes were established in Tokyo: The Association of Islamic Culture (J. *isuramu bunka kyōkai*) and the Islamic Studies Group (J. *kaikyō han*), which was housed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Tanada 2012: 92). The following year, the Greater Japan Muslim League (J. *dai-nippon kaikyō kyōkai*) was founded with funding from the Japanese government and military. Ōkawa Shumei, a prominent Pan-Asianist thinker, was deeply involved with the Greater Japan Muslim League. He was not only involved in research, but also in policymaking geared at Muslim populations who were coming under Japanese control after their quick and decisive expansion into Southeast Asia after the attacks on the Allied Forces around the Pacific starting on December 7, 1941. The first president of the Greater Japan Muslim League was Hayashi Senjuro, who had at one time served as prime minister of Japan. He was not a Muslim himself, but understood the value of politicizing and instrumentalizing Islam for political purposes. The organization made direct policy suggestions to the Japanese Government regarding Muslims and places with predominantly Muslim populations, like Xinjiang and the Dutch East Indies, which came under Japanese control in March 1942. The organization was dissolved three months after the end of the Pacific War during the American occupation of Japan. It was then reconstituted as the Japanese Islamic Association (J. *Nihon Isuramu Kyōkai*). In the early 1960s, the contents of the Greater Japan Muslim League's extensive library were donated to Waseda University, which now houses the largest collection of works on Islam in Japan (Hammond 2020: 41–53).

While imperial Japan was exerting more control over Muslims in China, Muslims from China were also trying to figure out their place in the new post-imperial state. After the dissolution of the Manchu Qing Empire, the new Republic quickly started to fracture. By the 1920s, a number of Muslim families, who had been intermediaries between their local communities and the Qing state for many generations, began to exert more direct control over their localities. In the northwest, the Ma Clan held a firm – if oppressive – grip over the region. In Guangxi,

Bai Chongxi ruled over the local population with impunity. Bai was a skilled soldier and ardent anti-communist who threw his support behind Chiang Kaishek and the Chinese Nationalist Party. Bai witnessed Chiang's political and military maneuverings to bring the fractured state back together, and decided it was in his best interest to support him. In 1927, Bai coordinated the purge of the Communist Party in Shanghai, which forced the CCP to spend a number of years regrouping in a rural base in Jiangxi, which is in southern China.

After a number of years, the Chinese Nationalists grew concerned about the CCP and forced them out of the south. After the Long March ended in Shaanxi in October 1935, the Chinese Communists came in increasingly close contact with the Muslims who lived in north-west China. For the most part, Muslims were weary of Communist land reform campaigns because they were concerned about seizure of *waqf*. Like other Muslims around the world, Muslims from China had carefully observed the seizure and redistribution of mosque assets in the Soviet Union and were rightfully concerned about their own position vis-à-vis the Chinese Communist Party (Hammond 2020: 189–191). On the other hand, the Chinese Nationalist Party worked on a platform of inclusion that was generally perceived as hollow by non-Han minorities. This meant that in their efforts to implement reform agendas within their communities, Muslims in China often saw the Japanese Empire as one of the many options they had for political leverage and influence in the region. Through outreach efforts that were tailored to the specific needs of Muslim communities – such as reforming madrasah education – the Japanese Empire was able to insert itself into the fraught political territory on the Chinese mainland. The Japanese Government established a number of schools for Muslim children throughout Manchukuo, and at these schools, besides learning Arabic and Chinese, the students were also taught Japanese (Hammond 2020: 85–105).

The Japanese Government established Islamic Associations in Manchukuo. After the occupation of Beijing in July 1937, all of the associations came under the umbrella of the Japanese-sponsored All China Muslim League (C. *zhongguo huijiao zonglianhehui*), which was based in Beijing (Ando 2003: 31). These research branches also produced reports on the economic output of Muslims living in occupied China. One report relayed very detailed information about Muslim guilds in Beijing. The report divided the Beijing Muslim community by specific economic sectors. According to the report, the top six jobs for Muslims in the city in descending order were: fruit and vegetable vendors, pack animal traders, camel traders, beef and mutton butchers and vendors, duck vendors, and jade traders (Hammond 2020: 53–55).

At the same time, the Japanese Empire did outreach about Islam and Muslims to Japanese subjects living on the home islands. Unlike Buddhists, who were familiar to Japanese subjects, the Japanese Government needed to explain what Islam was and how valuable Muslims were to their visions for empire. In order to do this, the Greater Japan Muslim League circulated publications like *Islam* (J. *kaikyō ken*) and *Islamic World* (J. *kaikyō sekai*). They also hosted large exhibitions about Islam for visitors to attend and learn about Muslims and Islam. This outreach, then, coincided with a more coherent policy geared towards Muslims living on the Chinese mainland.

In order to assess Japan's approach towards Muslims, it is important to consider a few things. Firstly, before 1943, it was definitely not clear that Japan was going to lose the war, and working with the Japanese Empire presented all kinds of opportunities for Muslims from places like Afghanistan and China. Secondly, a lot of their policies failed, and although their outreach efforts were sometimes seen as an infringement into local communities, their plans were always contingent and never predetermined. The successes *and* failures of Japan's Islamic policies were dictated by many variables including access to funds, the international geopolitical situation, and perhaps most importantly, the necessary buy-in from Muslims themselves.

Yet, this never stopped members of the Greater Japan Muslim League from having broad and ambitious goals. The purpose of the organization was to increase the understanding between Japanese subjects on the home islands and Muslims around the world. This would in part be achieved through exchange programs that brought Muslims students to study in Tokyo. The goal of these exchanges was to increase economic exchange between regions where there were large Muslim populations – like Central Asia and South Asia – and the Japanese Empire. The League also saw the work of promoting an understanding about Islam as part of the larger aims to vilify the Soviet Union and their treatment of Muslim populations living in China and Soviet Russia's borderlands. These were seen as long-range policies that cost little and could have a favorable outcome on the ways that Muslims perceived the Japanese Empire (Hammond 2020: 153–168).

The Volga Tatars and other Muslims in Japan

After the Bolshevik Revolution, a group of Volga Tatar refugees made their way to Japan via Siberia with the help of a charismatic self-promoting Tatar named Abdürreşid İbrahim. İbrahim was active in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turanist circles throughout Central Asia, and through his work resisting the Soviets, he came in contact with Yamaoka Kotaro, a member of the Japanese ultra-nationalist Black Dragon Society (Brandenburg 2018: 143–172). İbrahim first travelled to Japan in 1908, and played an important role fostering the development of relations between the Japanese Government and anti-Soviet Muslims throughout Asia. However, the relationship between İbrahim and the Japanese Government caused a number of diplomatic issues for them. The Turkish Government had revoked his citizenship after he fled to Japan, and even though the staff of the Turkish Embassy was regularly invited to events for Muslims in Tokyo, they rarely attended because they could not publicly acknowledge İbrahim (Hammond 2020: 110–116).

The Tatars found a welcoming home in Japan for a number of reasons, but it was the fact that they were so different from Japanese subjects that made them useful for Japanese propaganda purposes. The Japanese needed the Tatar refugees because their religious and cultural differences suited the changing needs of the empire (Bayliss 2013: 390). The politicization of Muslims as both different yet integral to the Japanese visions for a Greater East Asia offers the opportunity to think about the ways that non-Japanese subjects were used and deployed in the service of empire, likely without their explicit consent. In order to present themselves as benevolent protectors of Islam, the Japanese Government also built a school for the Tatar children and regularly trotted them out for photo opportunities (Hammond 2020: 116–118).

Beyond the Volga Tatars, there was a small community of South Asian traders and exiles from the British Empire living in Kobe and Nagoya. After raising funds from the community, they built the first mosque in Nagoya. It opened in 1931. The second mosque was erected in Kobe four years later. The third mosque in Japan opened in 1938. Unlike the two other mosques which were built with funds raised from the community, the Tokyo Mosque was built almost entirely with money from the Japanese Government. The opening ceremonies were attended by Muslims from around the world. The guest of honor was Prince Hussein of Yemen. He was invited to attend because Yemen and Fascist Italy were allies. When the Yemenis looked for political backers to thwart off British influence in the region, the Italians answered their call. Fascist Italy had joined the anti-Comintern Pact, so inviting a representative from a Muslim country that was allied with the would-be Axis Powers to be the guest of honor at the opening of the mosque was a calculated geopolitical maneuver (Hammond 2020: 109–119).

The opening ceremonies were run by Abdürreşid İbrahim, who also served as the first Imam of the Mosque. Muslim dignitaries from China, Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

the Dutch East Indies, India, and the Philippines all attended the opening of the mosque. In Tokyo, the delegates spent a number of days touring the imperial capital and mingling with each other. The five delegates from mainland China also had a number of meetings with the Japanese Government when they were in Tokyo and it was agreed that one of the men – Tang Yichen – would organize a Japanese-sponsored *hajj* delegation upon his return to occupied Beijing (Hammond 2020: 126–127).

Muslims on the move with the help of the Japanese Empire

During the war, the borders between Manchukuo and “Free China” were not impervious and Muslims traveled between the two regions (Hammond 2020: 75–80). There were also a number of Muslim men and women who left the regions under occupation in the service of the Japanese Empire. Many of them made their way to Tokyo to study Japanese, and a small group of men were invited to perform a *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca on the Japanese dime. Organized by Beijing Muslim Tang Yichen, the men left North China in December 1938 and traveled via an Italian steamship from Shanghai to Masawa, the capital of Italian-occupied Eritrea. After spending a few days in Eritrea, the men crossed the Red Sea and made their way to Jeddah. Once in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they performed their *hajj* and then had a meeting with a Saudi Prince. After their return to north China, the first ever diplomatic mission, led by career diplomat Masayuki Yokoyama, was sent to negotiate for an oil concession with the Saudi royal family. The negotiations ultimately failed because the British and the Americans intervened (Hammond 2020: 132–143). In this regard, sponsoring the *hajj* was a relatively cheap way for the Japanese Empire to attempt to secure an oil concession in Saudi Arabia.

On their *hajj* the five men learned a lot about themselves and about the different ways that Islam was practiced throughout the Indian Ocean. In unfamiliar places like Singapore, Colombo, and Eritrea, the group was forced to rely on their connections to the *dar-al-Islam* and managed to get by with the help and goodwill of Muslims they encountered along their way. At the same time, the men were familiar with the international geopolitical situation of the war and understood full-well why the British had denied them *hajj* visas at the consulate in Shanghai. Their known affiliation with the Japanese Empire meant that they had to rely on the allies of the Japanese – in this case, the Italian Fascists – to help them complete their religious journey.

This is just one example of a group of Muslims whose movements during the war were facilitated by their cooperation with imperial Japan. These transnational stories of wartime movement provide an important glimpse into the daily lives of Muslims, and the interactions of Moro, Javanese, Afghan, and Chinese Muslims who had the chance to travel to Tokyo to study during the war complicates the picture of Japan’s wartime ambitions. In essence, starting in China and then adopting and implementing their policies geared at Muslims throughout the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and then even beyond it, the Japanese Empire had long-ranging and ambitious plans to accommodate Muslims and create new Muslim consumers around the globe (Ngeow and Ma 2016: 2108–2128).

Afghanistan in the Japanese Imperial imagination

Afghanistan was an important space in the Japanese imperial imagination. Shortly after the Meiji Restoration, a number of Japanese scholars began looking for the roots of Japanese Buddhism, and this led them to Central Asia. When the Meiji Government adopted Shinto as the state religion, Buddhism was marginalized. In order to attract a number of wealthy

benefactors, Buddhist monks and explorers traveled to Central Asia in order to reclaim their Buddhist pasts (Galambos 2015: 33–61; Green 2017: 47–70). In many ways then, the Japanese Empire's interest in the region began with an interest in pre-Islamic Central Asia, but as their imperial aspirations grew throughout the early years of the twentieth century, so too did their interest in Muslim groups that could be used to destabilize British India and Soviet Central Asia, like the Balochis.

Unlike in China, where they had connected themselves to Chinese Muslims through Ming Dynasty Muslim literati, there were no ways for scholars of Islam in Japan to make up connections to Muslims in Afghanistan before the early twentieth century. This meant that Japanese scholars opted for other avenues and established imagined links through pre-Islamic Buddhist ties and ideas about circulations of goods and peoples on the early modern Silk Road (J. *shiruku rōdo*). Japanese connections to an Islamic past were always tenuous, but that never stopped Japanese imperialists from attempting to highlight their interactions with Afghans for over a millennium. These stories of early modern connectivity were often based on the value and movement of commodities. For instance, lapis lazuli, which is mined in Afghanistan, was prized in Japan, as was white Jade, which is only mined in far western China (Hammond 2020: 203–214). In their attempts to create an economic bloc free from western intervention, the Japanese Empire could highlight this early modern connectivity as a way to showcase that it had been accomplished in the past.

Japanese explorers started making their way to Central Asia, often under a lot of suspicion about their intentions and motivations from westerners they encountered along the way (Galambos 2015: 49). It was likely that they debriefed the Japanese Government or Army Officials upon their return to Japan, but this was no different than what men like Swedish adventurer Sven Hedin were doing back in Europe (Hughes 2002: 447). A number of Japanese Buddhists, led by Tachibana Zuichō of the Nishi Honganji branch of the Jōdo Shinshū sect, were sponsored by Japanese count Ōtani Kōzui to undertake three exploratory expeditions to Chinese Turkestan, Pakistan, and Northern India. The purpose of these types of trips was to uncover the pre-Islamic Buddhist connections between Japan and the region, as well as to extract Buddhist art, scriptures, and artifacts for museums and private collections on the home islands (Galambos and Kōichi 2012: 113–134). By drawing on symbols from the past in their overtures to the Afghans, Japanese policymakers drew on deep, imagined connections to a pre-Islamic Buddhist past between Japan and Afghanistan that was often embodied in the commonalities between some essentialized version of Afghan tribalism and Japanese *bushidō* culture (Hammond 2020: 205). But these imagined connections were entirely new and modern.

After the Russo-Japanese War, Afghans rushed to send military advisors to train in Japan, and, in 1907, General Ayub Khan, a veteran of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, visited the Tokyo Naval Academy and stayed in Japan for about three months. They also tried to establish diplomatic relations with Japan, but the British Government put pressure on the Japanese Government to deny this request. It was not until the 1930s that the Afghans and the Japanese Government established legations in the respective states. These efforts were also part of a growing desire on the part of both the Japanese and Afghan governments to increase trade between the two countries. Japanese manufactured goods were readily available in Kabul and Kandahar and the Afghans exported lamb and sheep, as well as dried fruits and raw cotton to Japan.

After official diplomatic and trade relations between Afghanistan and the Japanese Empire were established, Afghan students began travelling to Tokyo on scholarships from the Japanese government. Most of the scholarship students were enrolled at Kyoto Imperial University and Tokyo Imperial University, where they studied practical majors such as economics, agricultural

sciences, politics, and industrial spinning (both wool and silk). With support from the Japanese government, these students were to return to Afghanistan and use what they had learned to facilitate development and trade between the two countries. Overall, these types of educational endeavors were a relatively inexpensive way to promote Japanese imperial objectives in a place was not a part of the Japanese Empire (Hammond 2020: 211–212).

On a practical day-to-day level, Japanese officials stationed in Kabul understood the value of having Afghans on their side in the ongoing war against the Allies. Afghanistan was also a place for the Japanese Empire to gather intelligence about the movement of Muslims throughout Asia. Diplomats stationed in Kabul reported back to Tokyo about Muslims exiled from the British Empire. Through de-briefings and intelligence gathered from refugees and informants in Kabul, the Japanese government extended their reach into predominantly Muslim regions that they were one day hoping to bring under their direct control. During World War II, Afghanistan somehow managed to maintain neutrality, even though it was enveloped by the Allies on all sides after the Soviets joined the war in 1941. After Operation Barbarossa, the failed Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union which began in June 1941, and under increasing pressure from the British and the Soviets, many Axis nationals were expelled from Afghanistan. The Germans and the Italians left a small staff to manage affairs, but the Soviets could not compel the Afghans to demand that the Japanese bureaucrats also be expelled because of the neutrality pact between the Soviets and the Japanese government. This ensured that the Axis powers could continue to gather intelligence about Muslims moving throughout the region after Operation Barbarossa started.

In many ways, the Japanese government's interest in Afghanistan was always closely aligned with their interests in China and with their Islamic policy, and Afghanistan was essential to the Japanese Empire's anti-Soviet and anti-Nationalist agitation in Xinjiang. Afghans were sympathetic to Muslims living in Xinjiang, who were vulnerable to Soviet attacks, and the Japanese government was suspected of funneling money and arms to anti-Soviet fighters throughout the region from their bases in Kabul and Kandahar.

In terms of academic interest in Afghanistan, like with Muslims from China, Japanese scholars wrote prolifically about the region. Throughout the 1930s, as the Japanese Empire's interests in Afghanistan gained momentum, the published material available about the distant region also increased. Scholars like Murata Shōzō published works with titles such as *Afghanistan's Foreign Relations after the Great War* in order to bring the history of Afghanistan to a broader audience on the home islands. Japanese academics claimed closeness to Afghans through their mutual appreciation for moral valor associated with Shinto *bushidō* rituals, which were presented as the counterpart for Afghan patriarchal honor codes (Amin 2007: 5). In the lead up to World War II, Japanese scholars tried to reinvigorate ideas about historical connections to Central Asian Buddhists. Others described the parallel political developments in Japan and Afghanistan in the late nineteenth century. After the Meiji Restoration and the modernization reforms of Amir Sher Ali, both places had modernized their armies, abolished the feudal system and tax-farming, and set up proper postal services (Amin 2007: 10). This parallel track was presented as reason for their mutual affinity for one another in the twentieth century. The wartime connections between Afghanistan and the Japanese Empire serve to highlight the ways that Japanese policy makers aspired to create new markets and diplomatic relations with places that we might generally consider to be beyond the Japanese sphere of influence.

Conclusions

By placing imperial Japan's efforts to coopt Muslims and coordinate Islamic policy in Asia at the center of the story of Japanese imperial expansion in China and into Central Asia,

the chapter provides an overview of the ways that Muslim communities in Central Asia and China interacted and engaged with imperial Japan. Part of the transnational turn has allowed academics to ask new questions about the connections and networks of diverse groups of people that were facilitated and maintained with the help of the Japanese Empire. Muslims in China and Central Asia are an important part of this story, and including them into the narratives of Japanese imperial expansion and aggression on the mainland provides new insights into some of their long-term plans concerning Muslims living under their imperial purview. Of course, after Japan lost the war, these policies came to an abrupt end. But, in 1952, after the end of the Allied Occupation of Japan, diplomats made their way to Saudi Arabia and the Middle East to begin searching for oil contracts to fuel the new post-war economy. These, like many assume, were not new relationships, but ones built and cultivated from the 1930s with the help of Muslims from China and Central Asia.

Note

- 1 Much of the material from this chapter is drawn from my book, *China's Muslims and Japan's Empire: Centering Islam in World War II* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). For a more in-depth look at some of the issues raised in this short chapter, please consult my longer and more detailed study.

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MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION IN CHINA

Nancy S. Steinhardt

Islam has maintained a presence in China for nearly 1,400 years, almost since the emergence of the faith on the Arabian Peninsula. Objects from Muslim lands that came to China for use in worship and daily life have been found in every location where there were Muslims: an iron magic square with Arabic numbers uncovered at the ruins of the palace of Qubilai's (1215–1294) son Manggala (d. 1278), today in Xi'an (Xia 1960; National Museum of Chinese History 1997: vol. 4, 35), and a bronze plaque with an Arabic inscription inlaid in gold, in the Ningxia Hui Museum (Chen and Tang 2008: 169), are among them. The oldest Arabic Qur'ans produced in China date from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), one of which, dated 1318, is located at Dongsì Mosque in Beijing. It is believed to be written by someone of Salar ethnicity from Ningxia. An undated Qur'an found in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County of Qinghai in 2007 may be from the same time period (english.cntv.cn/program/culturexpress/20130606/102253.shtml). A bowl with incised floral motifs excavated at the remains of a walled town that belonged to a Muslim also is in the Ningxia Museum (Chen and Tang 2008: 169). Chinese blue and white and cobalt-glazed porcelain has been found in all these parts of China.

Since the arrival of Islam to China in the seventh century, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, the mosque has been the center of community religious life, Muslim education, and socialization. Yet whereas a mosque is certain evidence of Islam, it is harder to confirm which ritual objects or goods of daily life were used by Muslims, much less that they were produced exclusively for Muslims.

Bronze incense burners, for example, stand in front of Muslim worship halls and on tables inside them. They are also used in Chinese temples. Blue and white Chinese porcelain, with patterns common in West Asian ceramic wares, and sometimes with Arabic inscriptions, often were secular items both used in China and for export (Li, Bower, and He 2010: 540–559). Cloisonné vases now in the collections of mosques could similarly have been purchased or gifted as exotica. Paintings and calligraphy also entered mosques through the ages; some with purely secular subjects, including human figures, are now in museums in China. How they came to mosques is usually unknown, but one wonders if the prohibition against figural representation in religious spaces was not consistently observed among Muslims in China. Other goods on paper, such as dedicatory or salutary writings, as well as placards with glorifications, Qur'anic verses, or lines of *hadith*, are indistinguishable in materials employed, and format, from Chinese equivalents at Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian temples.

Stele and decorative stonework and woodwork, the latter two often with inlay, are highly informative about the processes of adaptation, convergence, and/or assimilation of Muslim goods and Chinese techniques. Coffins and cenotaphs in standard Islamic shapes may have floral patterns including lotus petals that are ubiquitous in Buddhist stonework. Decoration in various materials on enclosing arcades, or screen walls at mosques, can be indistinguishable from their counterparts at Chinese temple complexes; woodwork patterns in *maqsuras* (a separated area within a mosque for a ruler or his representative) and elaboration of *mihrrabs* (the recessed space in the wall of the mosque that faces Mecca, indicating the direction of prayer) include the same floral motifs and honeysuckle and vine patterns carved on wooden altars or door panels in Chinese religious and palatial environments; sometimes they appear to be interchangeable in the Chinese and Islamic context (Kadoi 2009). A few extraordinary convergences of Chinese object and Islamic use have occurred. In the Qing period, bovine scapulae, the media of oracle bone inscriptions used for divination in the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE) were used by Muslim children as writing tablets (Chen and Tang 2008: 311). Similar dynamics of convergence are explored in this volume by Roberta Tontini and Torsten Tschacher.

One reason that mosques have survived and often flourished is because their architectural necessities can be accommodated by the Chinese building system. Mosques stand alongside Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian architecture in China's cities and countryside with few exterior features to indicate their purpose. Approximately 70 Chinese mosques, dated to the nineteenth century or earlier, exhibit clearly Chinese features, but they comprise a tiny fraction of the more than 40,000 mosques in China today (Ben Du 2010; Ding 2013; Lu 2003; Lu and Zhang 2005; Qiu and Yu 1992; Steinhardt 2015; Wu 1995). More than two-thirds of those mosques were found, at least until 2014, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, a territory that includes the city of Kashgar and borders Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. These are also China's newest mosques. The oldest mosques belong to the Hui, sinophone Muslims. It is with them that we begin. We then turn to China's best-known mosques in Xi'an and Beijing, and to those built along the Grand Canal; the last of which were dated to the end of seventeenth century onwards.

Beginnings

Whenever and wherever Muslims first entered China, the architecture around them was a coherent system with a multi-millennial history, with a building system that already accommodated the worship requirements of another foreign religion, Buddhism. Buddhist monasteries had been named with the character *si*, meaning “official institution” as the suffix, and religions with a smaller presence in China such as Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and Church of the East (Nestorian Christianity) also built religious institutions named *si*. Scant remains of these three faiths, as well as inscriptions and descriptions, indicate they used the same timber-frame buildings arranged around courtyards as Chinese Buddhist and Daoist monasteries. The Chinese word for mosque would then be *qingzhensi*, *si* being the same suffix used for Buddhist monastery. The name translates as “pure, true, religious institution.” *Qingzhensi* was the Chinese word for synagogue too.

Architecturally Islam required little accommodation by the Chinese building system. China's first mosques may have had no visible signs, and for this reason the only physical evidence of a mosque in Chang'an (today Xi'an), the capital of the Tang dynasty (618–906), is an inscription on a much later placard (Chen and Tang 2008: 71). Chinese records inform us that an envoy from “Arab lands” paid respects to the Emperor in Chang'an in 651 CE (Liu Xu 1975: 5315). Between 798 and 946, at least 35 Arab and 20 Persian envoys came to China (Leslie 1986: 16).

It is possible Chang'an's Muslims prayed in houses, as had occurred among China's early Buddhists, and in the first decades of Islam in Arabia.

It is also possible that Muslims in Chang'an were not permanent enough to sustain mosques. The rise of Muslim communities and construction of mosques in coastal cities of southeastern China was different. Whereas travel to Chang'an from the West in the Tang dynasty was almost exclusively by land along the Silk Roads, with many oases where one could stop and trade along the way, Arabs who came to China by boat in the same centuries stayed longer. Sea routes along the Silk Road of the Sea circled southern India, and trade winds necessitated that merchants dock and stay for at least 15 months at port cities along China's southeastern coast. By the year 900, there are said to have been 120,000 foreign merchants in Guangzhou (Qiu 1993: 116). China's oldest mosques are in the port cities of Guangzhou (Canton), Quanzhou (Zayton), Hangzhou, and Yangzhou.

Mosques and supporting institutions including schools and cemeteries flourished because local as well as the national Chinese government allowed it. This was easy because the requirements of Islamic worship did not challenge the Chinese building system, with only an indicator of the direction for prayer towards the Ka'bah in Mecca being necessary. It is often a niche (*mihrab*) added to the wall (*qibla*). In a mosque for Friday congregational prayer, of which there were many in China, one finds a stepped pulpit (*minbar*) from which the sermon is delivered. Sometimes an important person such as the Caliph prays in an enclosed or semi-enclosed space known as *maqsura*. A mosque is often organized around a courtyard (*sahn*), a space that may include a pool or building for ablutions. Although the minaret is a visual beacon, it was not a feature of the earliest mosques; nor is it essential (Bloom 2013: 1–2). Inspired by Christian ascetics' towers, its primary function in Islamic architecture became for the ascent by the muezzin who calls worshipers to prayer. Further, whereas Buddhist and Daoist temples have altars that focus worship, they do not have chairs. Without an altar, the main interior prayer space in a Chinese temple usually is large enough to accommodate hundreds of prostrated worshipers. Both mosques and Chinese temple complexes include buildings for lecturing and teaching, residences for the spiritual leader and pilgrims, student dormitories, and libraries. Both also have time-keeping devices, in China, towers with bells or drums and clocks in mosques. Both centers of their communities, mosques and Chinese monasteries often have adjacent or nearby markets. Often one expects a dome above the prayer hall of a mosque, a legacy of Roman mausolea in the Mediterranean region. The Chinese have also built domes since the last centuries BCE.

China's earliest Islamic decorative objects and architecture

Although no mosque bears evidence of it, Sino-Muslim trade flourished in the Tang dynasty. Chinese ceramics were imported to the 'Abbasid capital Samarra beginning in the ninth century (Tampoe 1989: 87–95). The dramatic discovery in 1998 of a shipwreck at Belitung, an island between Borneo and Sumatra, confirmed the breadth of trade between China and every port of South and West Asia in the Tang dynasty (Krahl et al. 2010). The more than 60,000 objects were evidence of motifs on ceramics, metalwork, and other objects that might be copied or inspire patterns that found their way to decorate architecture (Kadoi 2009). One knows these objects were available because so many ceramics and pieces of metal from the Islamic world, as well as China, are in the collections of mosques in China today.

Epigraphic evidence of Muslim communities survives from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The most extensive documentation comes from the seaport Quanzhou in Fujian province, where Brahmans, Manichaeans, and Christians had a strong presence alongside the

Muslims; there were at least seven mosques in the Song dynasty (960–1279). According to Lin Zhiqi, an official and, for a time, trade commissioner in Quanzhou, a cemetery for foreign merchants, including Muslims, was built between 1162–1163. The earliest Muslim epitaph dates to 1171 (Chen Dasheng 1984: Xva-b, XX-XXI; Chen and Kalus 1991: 29–30).

More inscriptions in Arabic and Persian from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries survive in Quanzhou than anywhere else in China. Forty-five dated funerary inscriptions and 119 without dates were documented in the 1990s; more have been published since then (Chen and Kalus 1991:101; Wu and Wu 2005). Tombstones and inscriptions of the Guo family, that numbered more than 10,000, inform us that they trace their lineage to Muslim settlers in the Song and Yuan periods, and through intermarriage to Chinese who survive today (Lineages of Guo Family). Inscriptions on tombstones and cenotaphs provide the date AH, as well as according to the reign year of the Chinese emperor. The imagery is of the distinctive international style in Quanzhou: inscriptions are in Syriac, Latin, Manichaean, Arabic, and/or Persian, positioned alongside or on the back side of deities, winged flying beings, and symbols such as the crucifix specific to a faith; and cloud and floral patterns that converge as Sino-Islamic and sometimes as Sino-Islamic-Christian-Brahman.

One of China's oldest mosques is also in Quanzhou. An inscription at the Mosque of the Companions records its founding date as AH 400 (1009–1010), although it cannot be proved that the mosque stands on its original site (Fujian Provincial Museum et al. 1991). The inscription says the mosque was renovated in 1310 under the direction of Ahmad ibn Muhammad Quds (Haji Rukah) from Shiraz (Chen 1984: 4). This is the date associated with the mosque. A description of the Mosque of the Companions written in 1350 by Wu Jian entitled “Qingjingsiji” (Record of the mosque) states that it was one of six or seven mosques in the city (Chen 1984: 1). Today the Mosque of the Companions is the only premodern mosque in China proper, with a stone pointed arch at its entry; this form can be called a *pishtāq*, a projecting portal that frames three sides of an *iwān* (Figure 18.1). The structure is seen in Iran in the eleventh century and later. The gray, granite entrance, 11.4 meters high, comprises three vaults: a three-sided, semi-circular, ribbed-arched, street-side entry with three recessed levels above the actual entrance and side ogee-arches at the second level; an octagonal vault, also only half of which is installed; and a dome. The Mosque of the Companions gateway is also the earliest evidence in China of stone *muqarnas*, the honeycomb-like projection whose origins also are West Asian.

Upon entering the mosque, one turned left, roughly westward, to the pillar-supported prayer space of approximately 20 meters square. The *mihrab* is at the center of the west side. Even though the eight street-side windows provided the only light source into a six-meter-high granite enclosure, this kind of exposure of the prayer area is as unusual in an Islamic space as a Chinese one: prayer is private, and activity in a Chinese courtyard is equally private. It is possible that when the mosque was constructed there was another courtyard between it and the street, or perhaps that the mosque was in a Muslim sector of Quanzhou.

Excavation revealed that the interior of the mosque was supported by at least nine pillars arranged in four rows of two or three. Nothing is known about the ceiling. The column placement may be traceable to Abbasid-period hypostyle mosques, such as the Samarra mosque or the Great Mosque in Qayrawan. In China, the hypostyle arrangement did not become common until the fifteenth century; the Hall of Spiritual Favors at the tomb of the Yongle emperor (1360–1424) outside Beijing is a building with this kind of complete column grid. There is little doubt that Mosque of the Companions had a noteworthy presence in Quanzhou. Brick and stone architecture existed in subterranean tomb construction in China since the first millennium BCE, but above ground mainly in the form of pagodas. It is impossible to assess



Figure 18.1 Entrance to Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque, looking outside, Guangzhou, Guangdong province. Fourteenth century; restored in twentieth century. Steinhardt photograph.

how many other mosques with stone buildings or this kind of formal entry might have stood in China during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Today, the Mosque of the Companions is the only one.

The pre-fourteenth-century Muslim community in Guangzhou did not leave as extensive an epigraphic record as the one in Quanzhou, but the Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque retains a building as distinctive as the *pishtāq* of the Mosque of the Companions. The extraordinary structure is the minaret, named Guangta, or Tower of Light, a Chinese translation of the Arabic word *manār* (light stand) (Yue 1981: *juan* 11) (Figure 18.2). The syllable *ta* is the Chinese character most often translated as pagoda. Like the use of *sī* for mosque, the Chinese language incorporates religious architecture of a foreign faith into the native system of religious names as well as forms. In addition to a translation of the Arabic name, the tall structure also served as a beacon for ships coming into the Guangzhou port. Other explanations for the structure are: that it was a tower from which the direction of the wind was determined; that *guang* (light) refers to the enlightenment anticipated by a call to prayer; and that the tremendous height and unique shape may have been symbols of the light of Islam in Guangzhou (Liu 1985: 13).

The minaret was visible from far enough away to be called a beacon. Elevated on a circular platform, the white plaster Tower of Light rose 35.75 meters. Today, it is at the southwest corner of the mosque, more than 20 meters in front of the main gate and one of the reasons it is assumed to be the oldest building at the site. Most date the minaret to repairs of 1350, but some believe it is more than a century older. Song scholar-author Yue Ke (1183–1234) wrote in *Tingshi* (“Bedside-table History,” a treatise of collected jottings about places and experiences



Figure 18.2 Entrance to the Mosque of the Companions, Quanzhou, Fujian province. Fourteenth century. Steinhardt photograph.

typical of educated officials of his day), that the building was like no tower he had ever seen. He used the word *lou* (tower), the designation for a tall, multistory building (Yue 1981: 125–127). There is no evidence Guangta was multistoried. Doors lead to two sets of interior stairs that rise through the minaret's interior and meet at platforms. Yue Ke also wrote that it could be ascended on the inside where there were ten stairs on each level. One wonders if he himself had been inside or if this statement is based on a verbal or written description. One further wonders if Yue Ke had ties to the Muslim community or if non-Muslims were permitted entrance to the mosque or its minaret in Guangzhou. Yue Ke relates that a golden phoenix at one time stood at top (Yue 1981: 125–127). Today there is a simpler bulb shape. A record of destruction in the Ming period (1368–1644) mentions a change of the top projection to this jewel-like form. If the date of the emendation is accurate, it is possible there was a phoenix on top in the late twelfth–early thirteenth century.

Like the *pishtāq* at the Mosque of the Companions, the Tower of Light suggests architectural sources from the Muslim world outside China. The cylindrical form recalls a minaret such as the one in Sangbast, Iran, dated c. 1100. In premodern China, a circular plan is rare. It is possible Guangta was inspired by the tallest Chinese structure, the pagoda. Many Chinese pagodas are more than twice the height of the Tower of Light. Liaodi Pagoda of Kaiyuan

Monastery in Ding county, Hebei, dated 1055 and 84-meters-high, and the 76-meter pagoda of Bao'en Monastery in Suzhou, constructed between 1131 and 1162, are examples builders in Guangzhou would have been familiar with. Both of them have interior stairs and a platform at every level. Their plans, however, have straight edges: almost every pagoda in China is four- or eight-sided. The pagoda of Chan master Fan in Yuncheng, in southern Shanxi province, dated 822, is a rare example of a round, brick pagoda. The lime-based plaster exterior of Guangta does have a history in China: it was used as a coating for walls before the fourteenth century in China. The minaret was refaced during repairs of 1935. No other building at Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque pre-dates the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

The plan of the Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque exemplifies the convergence of Chinese and Islamic architecture. The Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque is oriented due south, like the vast majority of Chinese religious and imperial building complexes. The prayer hall is approached from due south via three gates, with a T-shaped approach in front of the third gate. The T-shaped approach has a long history in Chinese planning, particularly in eminent construction. It was used in front of palaces at the Tang capital Chang'an, and in the Forbidden City in Beijing. The covered arcades that begin east and west of the third gate of the Flourishing of the Prophet Mosque create a large courtyard fundamental to Chinese spatial planning. The large prayer hall with a platform almost as large in front of it is the focus of that courtyard. In China, entry platforms like this lead to the front door of the main building of a temple or palace. Here, the plan breaks with Chinese custom. The platform anticipates the most important hall, but to enter it one must walk to the eastern end of the arcade and turn 90 degrees left (northward) to a gate that is the actual entrance of the prayer hall. The *mihrab* is at the back, on the western wall in the direction of Mecca. This directional change is evident only after one has passed through three gates and ascended the platform, or alternately has walked through a small courtyard on the east. The alternate building axis that leads to prayer is concealed behind gates, courtyards, arcades, and walls so that the single, crucial feature of Muslim worship is apparent neither from the entry to the mosque nor after entrance into the first two courtyards. The prayer hall and its *mihrab* are concealed in an otherwise Buddhist, Daoist, or Confucian building arrangement. This concealment was not due to concern about anti-Muslim sentiment. The minaret is powerfully prominent. At this port city with a large Muslim population the Chinese arrangement was intentional: Muslim prayer occurred in adapted religious-palatial space of China.

Transcendent Crane Mosque (Xianhesi) in Yangzhou dates to the thirteenth century (Chen 1973). Writings about this mosque state it was built by Puhading (Burhan ad-Din) who arrived in the city from Arabia in 1272. His death is recorded as 1275 and 1276 (Lu and Zhang 2005: 45). Puhading's tomb is in a courtyard together with worship space on the outskirts of the city on the Grand Canal. The other buildings in that courtyard are Chinese style, with a stone staircase framed by a marble balustrade decorated with stone lions at the approach, and pillar-supported buildings with bracket sets and ceramic tile roofs. Puhading's cenotaph is of the Chinese style used by Muslims: five layers of decreasing perimeter elevated on a base whose border is decorated with floral patterns. A placard above the front gate reads: "Tomb of Puhading, a holy man from Western regions."

A fourteenth-century mosque and Muslim cemetery are in Hangzhou. First built in the Tang dynasty and destroyed in the Song, the Phoenix (Huangfeng) Mosque today is believed to be about half its size in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. At one time it was one of six mosques in Hangzhou. A man named Alaoding ('Ala' ad-Din?) was in charge of its rebuilding during the period 1314–1320. The mosque was rebuilt again in 1451. Major renovations occurred later.

The Phoenix Mosque prayer hall has three side-by-side domes, a central octagonal one above the room with the *mihrab*, and rooms with hexagonal domes flanking it. In the main hall of the Buddhist monastery Baoguosi, built in 1013 in Yuyao, about 225 kilometers east of Hangzhou, three domes similarly span three central interior bays. The location in south-eastern China where Islam flourished suggests the building type may have been a source of the Phoenix Mosque. The plan of the Phoenix Mosque also may be related to its name; in 1052–1053 Phoenix Hall was constructed at the palace-turned-monastery Byōdōin in Uji, Japan. It was configured in the manner of the creature as a core building with two side wings. Three Muslim tombs are in the Hangzhou suburbs, one of which is said to belong to Buhatiya'er who had come from Mecca in the thirteenth century to transmit Arabian medical practices.

All four of these mosques date to the Yuan dynasty, the period of Mongolian rule. The unique circumstances of the pan-Asian Mongol empire meant that a multi-national population served the Qa'ans. Sayyid Ajjal Shams al-Din 'Umar al-Bukhari (1211–1279), known in Chinese as Saidianchi Zhansiding, born, as his name indicates, in Bukhara, was one of the most influential Muslims in Yuan China. Said to be a twenty-sixth-generation descendant of the Prophet, after the fall of his region to the Mongols, Shams al-Din joined Chinggis's (1162–1227) forces, became a military leader and government official, and rose to financial minister of the Yuan empire. His biography is recorded in Chinese and Persian sources and he and his son are mentioned by Marco Polo. In 1274, after the fall of the southwestern province Yunnan to the Mongols, Qubilai (1215–1294) appointed him governor of the Dali Kingdom (in Yunnan). During the five years until his death, Shams al-Din brought Islam to this region while at the same time promoting Confucian learning and building houses of worship for both religions, as well as Buddhism. The entire city of Kunming mourned his death and erected an archway to him that stands in a heavily restored version today. Tradition says that Shams al-Din both repaired and built mosques in Yunnan. Two of Kunming's current mosques are associated with him (Na Weixin 1992: 72–94).

The continuous movement of people and religions across Asia during the Yuan dynasty resulted in several monuments with strong ties to West Asian architecture. The tomb of Tughluq Temür (c. 1330–c. 1363) in Huocheng in northwestern Xinjiang is one. A seventh-generation descendant of Chinggis Qa'an, Tughluq Temür came to power in the Chagatay Qa'anate (Transoxiana) of the Yuan empire in 1346 and converted to Islam the next year. His Qa'anate, of some 160,000 people, converted in 1352. This part of the Mongol empire would fall to Tamerlane (1336–1405). Tughluq Temür's tomb is in every way the mausoleum of a fourteenth-century Muslim ruler. Brick with a tiled front façade, it has a rectangular ground plan of six meters across the front, 15.8 meters in depth, and is 7.7 meters high. The interior is two-storied. Above the corners are *muqarnas*. At the same time, bracket sets are molded above the eight columns that divide the sections of the octagonal upper level. This kind of mimicking of Chinese wood framing is standard in Chinese brick tomb interiors. Other than these corner features, Tughluq Temür's tomb is a structure whose closest comparisons are found in the roughly contemporary tomb of Buyan Quli Qa'an in Bukhara or in those of the Shah-i Zinda cemetery complex at Samarkand (O'Kane 2004).

Possible precedents for a structure such as Tughluq Temür's tomb are found among remains of the Tangut (Western Xia) empire (1038–1227) that was centered in Ningxia and spread into Gansu, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia. An example for an unknown occupant is in Khara-khoto, "black city," today in Inner Mongolia (Kozlov 1925). Pages of a Qur'an, marriage contracts, and other documents in Persian attest to the presence of Muslims at this Tangut commercial center (Chen and Tang 2008: 74).

Muslim architecture in Ming China

Return to native rule in the Ming dynasty did not diminish the practice of Islam. China's two most famous mosques date to the Ming period. One is located in Xi'an. Huajuexiangsi (Mosque on Huajue Lane) is said to have been founded by the seafarer-eunuch-official Zheng He (1371–1435), born a Muslim named Ma Sanbao in Yunnan province (where Saidianchi had been so influential a century earlier). Zheng He was also a major patron of a mosque in the southern capital Nanjing. The Xi'an mosque was restored during the Yongle (r. 1403–1424), Chenghua (r. 1465–1487), Kangxi (r. 1661–1722), and Jiajing (r. 1796–1820) reigns. This amount of attention to a religious institution is not that unusual: countless temples and monasteries were restored during these long reigns.

Huajuexiang Mosque is unique in scale, degree of preservation, quality of buildings, and Chinese style. It consists of five courtyards oriented due west, through which runs an extremely long axial building line. The front gate leads directly to the front entrance of the worship space. The first courtyard is formed by a screen wall, side gates, a central ceremonial gate erected in the Qing dynasty, and a five-bay gate. A stone gate elevated on a platform is in the second courtyard which contains two stele pavilions. One stele records a repair in 1606 and the other a repair in 1772. Directly behind the stone gate, at the focus of the third courtyard, is an octagonal structure named Shengxinlou (Examining the Heart Tower). Its height and shape have led some to assume it was a minaret, but this has never been confirmed. Behind the octagonal structure are the last two courtyards and the main part of the mosque. Courtyard four begins with three parallel gates, each of which can be entered from each of its four sides. To either side are lecture halls, the southern one joining a hall for ablutions in the third courtyard. A pair of octagonal pavilions and a pair of four-sided stele pavilions stand in front of the prayer hall, which leads from the fourth into the fifth courtyard. The fourth courtyard ends with a *yuetai*, to either side of which are screen walls. The worship hall and deep *mihrab* behind it are the only structures in the last courtyard. The back courtyard terminates at a screen wall (Figure 18.3).

The remarkably Chinese architectural features – gate, ceramic tile roofs, an octagonal timber-frame pavilion, and screen walls – and the orientation towards Mecca directed by a *mihrab*, render a convergence of Chinese and Islamic features. The Chinese elements are those of China's most eminent architectural tradition. The gates and screen walls have counterparts at the Qing imperial tombs and in the national Confucian Temple in Qufu, Shandong province, the latter constructed over the last 1,000 years. The octagonal pavilion at the Xi'an mosque is based on eight-sided pavilions across China. The long, axial plan recalls China's most distinguished religious complexes such as the Song imperial-sponsored Longxing Monastery in Zhengding, Hebei province, or the above-mentioned Confucian Temple where the emperor himself came to worship. Imperial-style architectural detail does not mean that the emperor came to the Xi'an mosque. It does suggest that the Xi'an mosque was a privileged site.

Ox Street Mosque in Beijing is similarly complex and has a longer history (Beijing Xuanwu Islamic Society 2009). The street name makes reference to the fact that Muslims eat beef but not pork. In 960, a Muslim seafarer known in Chinese as Gewanxianding came with his son to this district of Beijing, then the southern capital of the Liao dynasty, to teach Islam. At the time, the mosque was one of the four great mosques in the capital. The son Nasuluding (Nasr al-Din?) was presented with an official title and given permission to build a mosque. Mausoleums for *imams* were constructed there in 1280, 1283, 1309, and 1312. Extant buildings and stele are from the Ming and Qing dynasties.



Figure 18.3 Courtyard of Huajuexiang Mosque, Xi'an, 1392 with later repairs. Steinhardt photograph.

Like Huajuexiang Mosque, Ox Street Mosque is oriented east–west, but unlike the Xi'an mosque, the entrance is on the west. The second unusual feature is the presence of two multistory buildings. A screen wall marks the entry. A Chinese ceremonial archway and a hexagonal pavilion known as Wangyuelou (Tower for Viewing the Moon), used to check the moon during Ramadan, follow it. The prayer hall comes next, but because the approach to its entrance is on the west, one must walk around it to enter and face west for prayer. The minaret, here named *bangkelou* in Chinese after the Persian *bang* (call to prayer) (Wang 2001, 13), was constructed in the Qing period, and stands behind (east of) the worship hall. In all likelihood, entry for prayer at one time was from the east. Today, the lecture hall is the last structure on the west–east line and it can accommodate 1,000 congregants.

By the Ming dynasty, when the Mongols fled north and China returned to native rule, the majority of Muslims in China were Hui, Chinese-speaking Muslims who lived as Chinese. Following repairs of the Grand Canal between 1411 and 1415, commerce flourished between southeastern cities with large Muslim populations and northern cities. Muslims were active in this trade. Mosques rose along the Grand Canal as a result.

The Great East Mosque in Jinjing, the first major city north of Yangzhou on the Grand Canal, is the third largest mosque in China, after the mosques in Xi'an and Nanjing built by Zheng He. Eight structures stand along the east–west building line, today all dated to the Qing-period. Following two gates are a three-part, cruciform-shaped prayer complex: a front porch that functions as an antechamber, a wider prayer area behind it, and a narrower space behind it known as *yaodian* (literally “kiln hall” or “hole hall”), a unique feature of Chinese mosques.

Yaodian can serve as a place for a small group of worshipers with a *mihrab* at the very back. A moon-viewing tower and ceremonial gate are at the back of the mosque.

The mosque in Botou, Hebei province, was founded in 1404 by Muslims who moved into the region from Nanjing. Like most Ming mosques, it faces east. A two-story minaret, with an enormous prayer hall, is behind it. Cangzhou, farther north in Hebei, has seven old mosques. North Mosque, founded in 1402, is one of the oldest. Tianjin Great Mosque, founded in the late nineteenth century, replaced an earlier mosque on that site. It has a simple two-courtyard plan.

In Hebei province, North Mosque in Baoding was established during the Yongle reign (1402–1424). Baoding West Mosque was founded in 1616 and restored in 1906. Dingzhou Mosque was founded in 1348. Xuanhua North Mosque was constructed in 1703. Its massive worship hall is an example of the cruciform arrangement used in other Chinese mosques, with a front porch, large open worship space, and narrow *yaodian* at the back.

The city of Kaifeng in Henan province has two important mosques: the Great East Mosque founded in the Ming dynasty and repaired many times after that and Zhuxian Mosque (Figure 18.4), begun between 976 and 983, rebuilt in 1531 and 1744, and repaired in 2006. Like most other mosques with long histories, it has been Chinese in style since the beginning. Zhuxian Mosque has a front gate, pair of stele pavilions, one with a stele inscribed in Arabic and the other with a stele inscribed in Chinese behind it, a three-part prayer space, offices, residential space, a lecture hall, a room for ablutions on either side, and a back gate. The Great North Mosque in Henan's capital Zhengzhou also has a mosque from the Ming period.



Figure 18.4 Entrance to Prayer Hall, Zhuxian Mosque, Kaifeng, Henan province, sixteenth century with twenty-first century repairs. Steinhardt photograph.

Ming–Qing architecture and decoration in North-West China

In the seventeenth century, four Sufi orders became active in the western Chinese provinces of Gansu and Qinghai and the autonomous region Ningxia (Fletcher 1995: 1–46). The majority of Muslims involved in these sects were Hui. Two new building types occurred in their mosques: one was the *daotang*, or instructional halls, in which the religious leader supervised life as well as religion; the other the *gongbei*, the Chinese word for *qubba* (dome), and referring to the mausoleum of a holy man (Bi and Yi 2009; Zhang 2009). *Gongbei* always include a domed building in which the memorialized holy man is interred. There are nearly seventy *gongbei* in Ningxia.

The Na Family Mosque in Yongning was founded in 1524. It is also a rare Chinese mosque because it is so closely associated with one family. The mosque is dominated by a gate with side towers and the prayer complex behind it. The green roof tiles of the gate, reconstructed after 1982, present the image of a late Ming–early Qing tower: central bays are the widest on each level; the uppermost story has a hip-gable roof; each story of each pavilion has two sets of rafters beneath the convex ceramic end-tiles; the upper rafters are four-sided in section and the lower rafters are circular. The pair of towers at either side of the entry gate are reminiscent of minarets as well as Chinese gate-towers. The lattice patterns in the windows of the towers are found in mosques in many parts of the world, but the highly stylized bracketing that appears like lotus petals on architraves that support lintels derives from Chinese buildings. The worship space, 1,102 square meters, consists of the same three parts as the majority of mosques in China: porch, prayer space, and *yaodian*, all of whose roofs are interconnected in six sections. Lecture halls, educational rooms, dormitories, a guest hall for the *imam*, and an ablutions chamber enclose them. Tongxin Mosque, also in Ningxia, began as a Buddhist monastery during the period of Mongolian rule. It was converted to a mosque during the early Ming dynasty. This kind of transformation for use by another religion, or between secular and religious functions, is common in China.

In 2008, Gansu had more than 2,800 mosques, the earliest with histories dating to the Yuan dynasty (Chen and Tang 2008: 81). As in Ningxia, no pre-twentieth-century buildings are among them. The decision to reconstruct with wooden pillars, bracket sets, and ceramic tiles roofs or imitation-bracket sets is intentional. Many of the mosques are in the Hui autonomous regions of and around Linxia. Laowang Mosque is one of the largest. Founded in 1377, the next date associated with the mosque is 1736 when a wealthy local Muslim paid for repairs and expansion (Ding 2013: 158; Lu and Zhang 2005: 123). Reconstruction took place between 1980 and 1983. Laohua Mosque was founded between 1465 and 1487 and rebuilt in 1981. Throughout Gansu, hexagonal minarets with sharply upturned eaves are of the kind that imitate features of pagodas. Pingzhuang Mosque in Dongxiang Autonomous Hui County, contiguous to Linxia, exhibits a similar convergence of Chinese architecture and required mosque space. Inverted-pyramidal-shaped bracket sets of the kind used on the Pingzhuang Mosque gate are employed at Hongshuiquan Mosque, about 30 kilometers from the center of Xining, in Qinghai. These bracket sets also are used in Buddhist architecture in and around Xining, including at the monastery Qutansi.

Conclusions

Through more than a millennium of Muslim construction in China none of the requirements of Muslim worship or ritual was compromised. Every structure and space, each ritual component, as well as ornamental details of Islam, could be accomplished by Chinese craftsmen

and was compatible with the Chinese architectural landscape and its decorative environment. Islamic architecture and decoration were as easily adapted in China as had been Buddhist worship and ritual space centuries earlier. To a Chinese resident of a premodern city or town, the mosques and Muslim cemeteries conformed to existing structural types and were almost always made of materials that defined Chinese architecture. To a Muslim, the same buildings fulfilled the requirements of Islamic worship space. The blending was possible because it is so easy to adapt the Chinese building system and because Muslim worship did not require features that differentiate its architecture on the outside from that of Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism. Beginning in the 1980s, Chinese mosques came more to resemble their counterparts in Iran and on the Arabian Peninsula. By the turn of the twenty-first century, China's mosques had become buildings of global Islam, easily distinguishable from new Buddhist or Daoist temples that still retained features shared by the earlier mosques discussed here.

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PART IV

Imaginations of piety



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MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF ISLAM IN CHINESE TERMS

Community matters

Roberta Tontini

Introduction

The Sage Muhammad received persecution for spreading the [Islamic] doctrine and was forced to abandon his hometown Mecca to move to Medina. As he was leaving Mecca, the hometown that nourished him for so many years, the Sage Muhammad said, in deep commotion: “[I] swear in the name of God! Indeed, you (Mecca) were the object of my utmost love and the land I cherished the most prior to encountering God. Had they not expelled me, I would have never left you.” [This passage] reveals clearly the Sage Muhammad’s sincere and ardent love for [his] native land, as well as [his] incredible reluctance to leave. At the same time, [however,] the Sage Muhammad prayed God [as follows]: “God! I pray for you to cause our Medina to prosper! I pray for you to cause us to be well fed and clothed! God! I pray for you to give to Medina double the amount of good auspices than Mecca!”

Chen et al. 2006: 32

Over the course of history, Islam’s image has been burdened by doctrinal approaches inclined to privilege theological interpretations produced within the Arabic-speaking world over those articulated elsewhere. Still, in the twentieth century (Said 1997), media representations prone to conflate a “Muslim” with an “Arab” came with prejudices and presumptions around notions of “authenticity.” Eventually, such misconceptions contributed to jeopardizing not just the historical diversity of Islamic culture across the Middle East, but also the credibility of non-Arab Islamic communities, marginalized from a doctrinal viewpoint. At the same time, the increased validity assigned by mainstream media discourses to Islam in its allegedly “purer” Arabic-language formulations inspired Arabo-centrist approaches to Islamic theology prone to disregard contributions to the subject matter produced by non-Arabic speaking communities. In response to these perplexities and paradoxes concerning the legitimacy of regional interpretations of Islam, this chapter responds to a foundational question: “what makes a Muslim, Muslim?” It uses Islam in China as its focal point.

I proceed by addressing the aforementioned question in the context of China’s local *ulama*, i.e., Islamic scholars involved in the exploration of Islamic law and theology in the eighteenth century, to then evaluate its currency today. In doing so, I unpack and expand some

of the findings of my work on the Muslim *Sanzijing* genre (Tontini 2016, broadly definable as “Three Character Classics” for Muslims, i.e. Islamic primers written in triplets to facilitate learning of doctrinal tenets), while integrating it with anthropological insights collected during my fieldwork. I will show how the cultural axiom informing both the *Sanzijing* genre and the *Han Kitab* canon at large, i.e., the body of Chinese Islamic literature that emerged in late imperial times (1368–1911) from which the *Sanzijing* genre ensued, still enjoys continuous validity among Chinese Islamic schools today (Petersen 2017). I emphasize how Arabo-centrist approaches to Islamic theology never found a fertile soil in China over the long term, due to contextual reasons and conscious choices operated by local *ulama* with the consent and support of their intellectual community (for another discussion over Middle Eastern and Asian literary formulations of Islamic understandings see Tschacher, this volume).

By and large, Islamic theology in China – broadly intended as a “systematic discourse about God carried out by Muslims” (Winter 2013) that takes into account God’s sacred law (Goldziher 1981) – followed a regionalist trajectory that is still applicable to Chinese-speaking Muslims today (for an architectural approach to this issue, see Steinhardt in this volume). As expressed in the opening quote, besides the regionalist interpretative efforts of *ulama* in the eighteenth century, today the Chinese Communist Party has appropriated the emphasis on “lineage” at an intellectual as well as ethnic level to ensure sinophone Muslims’ adherence to the principles of patriotic education.

Intellectual genealogies and Chinese Islam

I initially expected my work on the history of Islam in China to revolve around a single primer, i.e., Liu’s text *Tianfang Sanzijing* (Liu 1864). Also known as the “Three Character Classic of Islam,” the text was written to initiate Muslims to the basic tenets of the *shari’a*, a subject the author unpacked more extensively in a separate legal work titled *Tianfang Dianli* – i.e., “Norms and Rites of Islam” (Liu 1710/2008).

Master Yizhai [Liu Zhi] authored several books based on the Muslim classics and histories, [which were] handed down for generations and became known to every household. [Among those,] only the *Tianfang Sanzijing* [was intended as] a book to educate ignorant [people]. Furthermore, he selected words [which were] seemingly plain and simple to [encompass] the whole essence of the Koran, the Sunna, the Principle, and the Way.

Yuan 1870/1989: 3; Tontini 2016: 57

Surprisingly, however, as different versions of the *Sanzijing* primer kept surfacing from mosques and archives, carrying different publication dates and significant variation in content, I realized that a more comprehensive study of Islamic law’s evolution in China was needed. Liu’s earliest version of the Muslim *Sanzijing* inspired enough commentaries, rewriting and expansions from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries as to turn into a full-blown “genre.” At its core, its tradition set forth a paradigm of Islamic legal orthodoxy that regards the ritual aspect of Islam (in terms of performance of ritualistic duties such as the five pillars, i.e., witness, prayer, fast, almsgiving, and pilgrimage) as unchangeable, while viewing the social aspect of Islamic law as susceptible to periodical updates. Here, hermeneutic interpretation shall not stem from improvised or personalistic interpretations of the law. Rather, it should derive from informed, communal reflection on Islamic law’s adaptation to ever-evolving social realities.

As such, the *Sanzijing* genre illustrates how in the shared perspective of multiple Chinese *ulama*, starting from the author of the first Muslim *Sanzijing* Liu Zhi (c.1655–c.1745), orthodoxy was largely defined in terms of ritual orthopraxy. Echoing the *Tianfang Dianli* and other works pertinent to the legal matter in China, the Muslim *Sanzijing* genre reveals how beyond the five pillars of Islam, local Muslim intellectuals view Islamic social norms as a continuous work in progress, expected to react to the evolving historical challenges confronting China's Muslim communities. Such a paradigm related to the assumption that a pious performance of the five pillars of Islam, and therefore compliance with the ritual aspect of the *shari'a*, would naturally act as a moral boundary to Muslim people's social behavior (on the five pillars, see also Rasmussen in this volume).

As such, the sage has said that prayer is the pillar of Islam. If people cause prayer to stand, they actually cause Islam to stand. If people give up prayer, they actually cause Islam to break down. Therefore, Islam is a principle without form, which cannot be seen in any place. [If one wants to] express this principle outside the execution of the [five] endeavors [*gong*], in the end [one will be left with] no place to start. Therefore, prayer is at the root of the ten thousand goods; it includes all the [religious] endeavors and duties [*gongke*] and distances [one] from every violation. Its standing has the impressive quality [of] inducing people to restrain body and heart. It has hints [one can] refer to and bodily [motions one can] perform. By not leading it to collapse is indicated that prayer is like a pillar, and it is said that the *dao* of society without it could not survive.

Yuan 1870/1989: 8–9; Tontini 2016: 71

Based on such a view, a pious performance of Islamic ritual duties, i.e. the *wugong*, can spontaneously inform allegiance to Islamic norms, or *wudian*, making the former prerequisite to the latter and justifying their “eternal” quality. The assumption that ritual practice is instrumental to social responsibility is partly rooted in the connection between ritual and moral conduct elaborated by Confucian thought and synthesized as follows by the Confucian Analects:

The Master said: “Lead the people with administrative injunctions and keep them orderly with penal law, and they will avoid punishments, but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence, and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.”

Analects 11: 3, see Ames and Rosemont 1998: 76

As in Confucius' view, the Muslim *Sanzijing* ascribed to ritual performance a pivotal role in shaping practitioners' social inclinations in a moral sense (Chow 1994; Rowe 1998). Consistent with such a view, the first version of the Muslim *Sanzijing* explains how a good “Islamic” nature would necessarily ensue from a meticulous adherence to the five pillars of Islam as the peculiar pattern of “ancestral worship” assigned to the Muslim “lineage” of China, as confirmed by Benite's insights on the cultural trajectory of Islam in the country (Benite 2005). In multiple instances, the *Sanzijing* confirms its endorsement of a Confucian view that sees ritual as a catalyst of morality.

God commands you through five things: at appropriate times remember God and reject heretical thoughts; pray five times a day, retreat from mundane affairs; fast one

month every year to eliminate desires and addictions; [if you are] rich tax [your own] wealth and realize benevolence and righteousness [*renyi*]; [and] travel to the Heavenly Square [the Kaaba] to test [your] sincere devotion. For both, the sage and the ordinary person, including the fool and the wise, these five things shall not be modified.

Yuan 1870/1989: 22–23; Tontini 2016: 64

Yuan Guozuo's (b. 1712) commentary to the *Tianfang Sanzijing* delves deeper into the alchemic power ascribed to each of the five pillars of Islam. Daily prayer is dealt with in generous details, for its ability to promote integrity through a sequence of metaphorically charged bodily motions.

Prayer is the endeavor that dispels fallacies and brings back truth. After raising the hands, [prayer] dissolves altogether the ten thousand causes. [Since] in ordinary days the selfish heart no longer disseminates and prospers, how [could one] not be cleansed and pure [*jiejing*]? Prayer requires the body to stand [upright], which means it does not allow any reversal.

Yuan 1870/1989: 9; Tontini 2016: 73

Following prayer, partaking in a fast during the month of Ramadan can train practitioners' ability to withstand any addiction. Paying the *zakat* is expected to boost their sense of responsibility vis-à-vis the community. Pilgrimage to Mecca can induce them to embrace a sense of shared past and spiritual values (Tontini 2016: 59–81). All pillars are bond to the initiation role assigned to the *shahada*, that "statement of faith" through which Muslims verbally acknowledge the authority of God and Muhammed's prophesy, as recorded in the Koran. By virtue of such acknowledgement, the *shahada* implies admission of the mandatory nature of Muslims' reflection over God's expectations from mankind, calling Muslims all over the world, regardless of language and location, to reflect over the ultimate message of the Koran and accordingly take part into its exegesis. These premises set the stage for the emergence of a transnational Islamic community that is simultaneously aware of its univocal roots, yet deeply intertwined with regional trajectories.

Subsequent *ulama*'s re-appropriation of Liu's *Sanzijing* model to track Islamic law's evolution in the Chinese context reveals that the tension between shifts and continuities in the local trajectory of Islam was largely solved by embracing the regionalist approach to theology synthesized by Liu in the earliest version of the primer. Such approach placed the local community and its exegetic efforts at the center of the theological scene. With the launching of the filliative transmission of Islam in China via the *Han Kitab* canon, through established chains of cross-referencing authors, the indigenization of Islamic theology in the country gradually but steadily departed from the Arabic and Persian sources from which it took off.

These sources' instrumentality to the development of a Chinese-language doctrinal inquiry was acknowledged through detailed bibliographies of non-Chinese language sources, such as those punctually recorded by Liu himself in relation to his major theological works, i.e., the *Tianfang Dianli* (Frankel 2011) and *Tianfang Xingli* (Murata 2009) (on both, see Leslie and Wessel 1982). However, such instrumentality was by no means meant to confine the doctrinal debate to non-Chinese works. Rather, it served the purpose of legitimizing the transition from foreign Islamic sources to local ones without severing the latter's connection to the earliest revelation of Islam in the Koran, facilitated by foreign sources.

By safeguarding such a connection, Chinese-language Islamic theology could embrace the concerns of Muslim living in China as integral parts of Chinese society. Intellectual genealogies

thus acted as the emancipatory mechanism for local Islamic scholarship from non-Chinese-language debates. The resulting establishment of networks of Chinese scholars involved in the progressive indigenization of such debates within and beyond the *Han Kitab* canon hints to the existence of a mutual “consensus” of scholars at work. The latter, in turn, resonates with the Arabic concept of *ijma*’ in Arabic, or “scholarly agreement,” and hints at the coming of age of a mature Chinese Islamic scholarship on the *shari’a* that by late imperial times reached a place of full-blown autonomy. If the *Han Kitab* writings showcase how theological debates were no longer bound to the consensus of foreign Islamic scholars, the *Sanzijing* genre in particular provides further evidence of the way such consensus became increasingly region-specific.

A Chinese-language theology thus sprouted from the Koran, and other basic sources, to grow increasingly intertwined with local hermeneutics. The concise summaries of Islamic law offered by the *Sanzijing* genre capture some of the core junctures of this process in legal terms. Updates to the social aspect of Islamic law could take place as long as awareness of the transmission chain was maintained. Scholars could prove their awareness of the chain by either resorting to bibliographies or by commenting and reformulating existing texts, as done by contributors to the *Sanzijing* genre. Only by proving engagement with the existing tradition, could they gain the intellectual authority required to align Chinese Islam to evolving contexts, and it is precisely in this sense that “community matters.” By failing to prove engagement with the local community, single scholars would have placed themselves beyond the pale of doctrinal orthodoxy by breaking an intellectual genealogy that retroactively stemmed from the Koran itself. Conversely, by acknowledging the contributions set forth by their predecessors, they could earn a legitimate position within the scholarly network, hence acquiring the authority needed to push the doctrinal debate forward.

This dynamic, ubiquitously detectable in the *Han Kitab* writings, is aptly mirrored by a diachronic reading of the *Sanzijing* genre. In it, one witnesses Chinese authors from different times and places passing to one another the baton of what it means to be a Muslim in China. The intellectual authority acquired by a given author finds reflection in such author’s legacy vis-à-vis the network, i.e., in his or her ability to gain consensus and further reception in the unfolding genealogy.¹ Success in such a sense is especially apparent in Liu. Who said what? How many scholars agreed upon it? Such indirect questions are key to understanding the regionalization of Islam in China. It follows that abiding by the word of the Koran to the exclusion of the hermeneutic legacy that emanated from it could not be regarded as orthodox practice from a Chinese Islamic perspective. Such procedure would necessarily invalidate the role played by local intellectuals in identifying and applying Islamic principles to the regional concerns of the Chinese branch of the Muslim *umma*.

From genealogy to regionalism

The relevance of this chapter on Islam in China *vis-à-vis* the larger agenda of this volume lays in its evidencing how for a major East Asian Islamic community such as the one represented by sinophone Muslims, Arabo-centrist approaches to Islamic theology proved to be a difficult paradigm to pursue. Above all, such paradigms would be incompatible with doctrinal attitudes deeply rooted in the local tradition (Tschacher in this volume, on Southern Asia). Seen from a strictly legal perspective, however, transcending the regional trajectory of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), as it unfolded in China at a regional level, would also fail to qualify as “orthodox” practice from a non-Chinese Islamic perspective (El Fadl 1994). Heterodoxy would ensue from breaking the continuity of the transmission bridging the message of the Koran to its local exegesis.

Simultaneously, ignoring the hermeneutic inputs set forth by local *ulama* on the basis of those advanced by their predecessors would determine a rupture in the transmission of Islam that would deprive the final output of intellectual authority. Measured from such a perspective, it is no wonder that Liu's version of the Muslim *Sanzijing* spelled out loudly and clearly how discontinuity in transmission chain of Islamic doctrinal knowledge would compromise the orthodoxy of the resulting interpretation. As emphasized by Yuan's commentary of Liu's text:

[The notion of] *daotong* relies on the exploration of the [transmission] flow [retroactively] in search of the source. If there is even a minor mistake, the *dao* is not correct.

Yuan 1870/1989: 31; Tontini 2016: 99

Similarly, the *Han Kitab* tradition, through its emphasis on bibliographies and cross-referencing networks of scholars, implicitly points to regional specificity as a prerequisite of orthodoxy. Seen from this angle, the view of foreign branches of the transnational Muslim *umma* as cultural models to be blindly emulated in China would necessarily jeopardize the legitimacy of any resulting theological output, which would become "incorrect" (to use Yuan's phrasing) due to its failure to insert itself into the local genealogy. This principle is aptly captured by Yuan's commentary:

If people comply with the books of one [school of law] without mixing them, they can be defined as pure Muslims [*Mumin*]. Therefore, [Liu Zhi] especially stressed this [point].

Yuan 1870/1989: 29; Tontini 2016: 93

Had the sole purpose of *Sanzijing* authors been that of voicing their own understanding of how to correctly implement Islamic law in China, they could have simply put their assessment of the subject in print and circulate it. Instead of writing primers *ex novo*, however, they chose to adapt Liu's three-character format in a shared intent to build upon an existing debate and to develop it. This procedure entails intellectual approval of the regional trajectory of Islam in China, in a way that resonates with Calder's insights on the role of "community" in Sunni Islam:

Sunni Islam is a religion in which although everything in one sense is taken back to scripture, in another sense is ongoing. It is a religion which seems to demand of its participants that appropriate acknowledgement be granted to the community as it develops through time. Every later participation in the forms of literature – and it is through established literary forms and genres that thought takes place – every later statement of faith or assessment of meaning of the Koran, takes into account the earlier statements worked out by the community.

Calder 2006: 78

Islamic hermeneutics in the Chinese language is indeed to be regarded as a communal enterprise. The genealogical sensibility that animates the Muslim *Sanzijing* genre and places communal engagement at its core (Wilson 1995) can be retrieved also in *Han Kitab* works that differently address the concept that "community matters" when it comes to interpreting God's expectations from mankind in an "orthodox" fashion. Among such works stand texts pertinent to the identification of scholarly networks, as explored by Benite in his seminal work *The Dao*

of Muhammad (Benite 2005). Most noticeably, however, such interest in intellectual genealogies is by no means outdated or limited to the *Han Kitab* canon. On the contrary, its traces can be detected today in the unfolding of contemporary Chinese Muslim scholarship. In addition, the ongoing vitality of the genealogical paradigm embodied by the *Sanzijing* genre is not confined to areas traditionally most exposed to Confucian philosophy, such as coastal China. Rather, it can be observed at a national scale. During my visit to Gansu, for example,² I came across books authored by Muslim scholars whose subject matter resembled the intellectual genealogies explored by Benite with regards to Zhao Can's work (Benite 2005, Zhao 1677/2008). Some of these works (e.g., Huang 2007; 2010) abided by modern academic standards yet were not published in a conventional fashion – at least, not at the time I received them. Instead, they were circulated as private publications among local intellectuals, without resorting to official publishing channels. The enduring stamina of the self-publishing industry among contemporary Chinese Muslim scholars echoes in spirit the motivation of ancient *ulama* while showcasing a devotion to doctrinal inquiry that goes beyond commercial interests.³

It is worth noting that all versions of the *Sanzijing* appeared and were initially circulated as private publications among scholars, including the “sequel” to Liu's original text composed in 2006 by the Yunnanese scholar Na Guochang (1929–2013; Na 2006). As the latter picked up on this ancient project to adapt it to the twenty-first century, Liu's paradigm of orthodoxy was transported to modernity, extending its legacy to contemporary Islam. Indeed, the prosperous trajectory of the *Sanzijing* genre, with multiple remaking and sequels of Liu's primer, proves the long-lasting currency of Liu's legal insights among Chinese-speaking Muslims today.

What motivates the continuous emphasis on intellectual lineage of these modern works? One may convincingly postulate a commitment to offer updated responses to the emerging challenges of China's growing exposure to foreign Islamic scholarship, including Arabic works. After all, if genealogy matters because of “community,” it is legitimate to expect the former's relevance to grow as the borders of the intellectual community expand and become more hybrid, or even global. Here, the availability of translocal interpretations of Islamic law and theology may reasonably urge an intellectual reconsideration of the boundaries of orthodoxy as traditionally defined. By extension, renewed emphasis on intellectual genealogy and attention to the “classics” of Chinese language scholarship may reflect an attempt to re-ground theology into local discourses, reinforcing the validity of Liu's regionalist paradigm. This phenomenon can be observed on multiple fronts, including the flourishing of reprinted versions of *Han Kitab* works during the first decade of the twenty-first century, including massive scholarly projects such as the 235 volumes compendium *Huizu diancang quanshu*, i.e., *Complete Library of the Hui People* (Wu 2008).

From a regionalist viewpoint, the filliative transmission of Islamic knowledge that initiated in Mecca and developed in China over the course of multiple dynasties had to be sheltered from doctrinal inputs that do not partake into the existing discourse. Failure to acknowledge the role played by local Islamic scholarship into the doctrinal architecture of Chinese Islam would inevitably disqualify the authority and credibility of all intellectuals involved. This dynamic would naturally penalize the doctrinal contribution of scholars of unproven or limited literacy into Chinese language Islamic scholarship, as primarily represented by the *Han Kitab* canon itself. While this is technically true of Chinese and foreign scholars alike, the challenge to foreign authors would be close to overwhelming, as language and cultural barriers would easily prevent them from engaging effectively with indigenous sources. This is why today China's Islamic “community matters” as much as it did before, at the expense of any Arabo-centrist understanding of doctrinal authenticity.



Figure 19.1 Exchange on the content of *Han Kitab* writings between Chinese academic and religious professionals (2012). Photo by Prof. Hu Long, printed with permission.

Contemporary legacy of Liu Zhi's regionalism

A native of the Jiangnan region during the Ming–Qing transition (mid-seventeenth century), and hence deeply exposed to the influence of traditional Confucian culture, Liu served as a pivotal figure in the process of indigenization of Islam in China. As indicated by the affectionate label “*Jielian baba*” (Father Liu Jielian), through which he is still known to many sinophone Muslims today, his intellectual authority gradually spread beyond the boundaries of his hometown Nanjing. His legacy is found in the curriculum of multiple Chinese Islamic schools, ranging from *gedimu* groups (the “old” schools, from the Arabic term *qadim* for “ancient”) to Sufi *menhuan* (or doctrinal “orders”) and the Chinese Muslim Brotherhood or *Yihewani* (Lipman 1997; Ye 1980). This is also true of the regionalist approach that he promoted through his rich and heterogenous scholarship, justifying his role as a trans-scholastic representative of Islamic law and theology in China. As illustrated in the following section, however, the instrumentality of Liu’s intellectual authority went beyond strictly Islamic concerns.

A closer look at the way the circulation of Islamic literature in Chinese has been coordinated at the level of the Chinese Communist Party ever since the early 2000s is instructive. An indication of top-down religious agendas during the first decade of the twenty-first century is found in the publication of handbooks for the education of religious professionals associated to China’s major religions – including Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam. These works, purposely inserted into the training curricula of Chinese monks, imams, pastors, and priests at religious institutions appointed to their training, were designed to promote religious compatibility with governmental agendas by aligning their “narratives” to the tenets of patriotism (e.g., Pang et al. 2005). A Muslim version of the patriotic handbook, the *Course in Islamic Patriotism*, appeared in 2006 dealing specifically with the applications of patriotic education’s guidelines to

Muslims, and offering clear instructions on the curriculum to be mastered by China's Islamic ethnicities as a central part of their religious heritage through the mediation of state-approved religious professionals (Chen et al. 2006).

Aside from considerations pertinent to the scientific value of these works, their existence can help us identify which aspects of each doctrine have been identified by cadres as compatible with socialism and represented as such to the religious professionals appointed to each religion. In the specific case of the *Muslim Course*, emphasis on "lineage" plays out simultaneously at an intellectual and strictly "ethnic" level:

The doctrine of Islam teaches that every Muslim should "obey God, respect the Prophet Muhammad, and follow those in authority." Hence, [Islam] not only invokes obedience to God and respect for Muhammad in [matters of] religious faith, rather, [it] also [demands] compliance with the leadership of [political] rulers, as well as observance of policies and law. If there is no cohesion among Muslims [belonging to] each ethnicity; and there is no cohesion among the various ethnic groups which comprise the great family of China, there can be no progress or development for Chinese Muslims, [either].

Chen et al. 2006: 20

Arabo-centrist approaches to Islamic theology are calibrated by the *Course's* representation of Muhammad's exodus from Mecca, which urged the prophet of Islam to redirect his loyalty to Medina and its people. In the logic of the *Course*, the devotion Muhammad reserved to his adoptive community shall stand as an example to the Islamic diaspora in China.

The Sage Muhammad received persecution for spreading the [Islamic] doctrine and was forced to abandon his hometown Mecca to move to Medina. As he was leaving Mecca, the hometown that nourished him for so many years, the Sage Muhammad said, in deep commotion: "[I] swear in the name of God! Indeed, you (Mecca) were the object of my utmost love and the land I cherished the most prior to encountering God. Had they not expelled me, I would have never left you." [This passage] reveals clearly the Sage Muhammad's sincere and ardent love for [his] native land, as well as [his] incredible reluctance to leave. At the same time, [however,] the Sage Muhammad prayed God [as follows]: "God! I pray for you to cause our Medina to prosper! I pray for you to cause us to be well fed and clothed! God! I pray for you to give to Medina double amount of good auspices than Mecca!"

Chen et al. 2006: 32

Hui people's participation to the development of Islam in China is expounded in great detail (Chen et al. 2006: 41–46). Arguably, proponents of patriotism are inclined to regard the cultural legacy associated to Islam in its Hui-Ru (i.e. "Islamic-Confucian") formulation as best suited to represent the trajectory of the doctrine in mainland China by virtue of its historical entanglement with Confucianism. Confucian overtones can be retrieved across the *Course*, providing evidence of Confucianism's continuous ascendancy. Referring to eminent Hui intellectual figures, the handbook recalls how

At the emergence of every [critical] juncture, these great thinkers uninterruptedly contributed enrichment, substance and coherence to the consolidation and development of Chinese Islam's cultural tradition, as well as to the development and

ripening of Chinese Muslims' patriotic tradition. Therefore, they caused factors such as Chinese Muslims' religious feelings, cultural identity and psychological character to not only possess the essence of Muslims' [inherent sense of] loyalty and Islam's [inherent sense of] peace, tolerance and self-confidence, but also to share the fine customs of humanity, filial piety and good faith advanced by Chinese traditional culture [as captured by the adage]: "treat others' children as if they were your own, and treat others' elders as if they were your own."

Chen et al. 2006: 41–42

Among the scholars featured in the section of the *Course* that outlines the history of Islamic thought in Chinese, a crucial role is assigned to cultural translators active in the synthesis of Islam in Confucian terms during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) period through the so-called *yi ru quan jing* movement, indicating "the resort to Confucian concepts to elucidate Islamic principles" (Stoeker-Parnian 2003). Such a "movement" was particularly lively within classical *Jingtang Jiaoyu* education, or "education of the hall of the scriptures," through which sinophone Muslims used to acquire literacy on Islam. Biographies of many of its core participants can be found in Bai (1988) and Bai (1992). Besides Liu Zhi, the text identifies selected works by Wang Daiyu (1584–1670), Ma Zhu (1640–1711), and Ma Dexin (1794–1874) as core representatives of the indigenization of Islam in China. Approval of these authors stems from a climate of overarching endorsement of "imported ideologies" that, similarly to socialism, proved capable of integrating "Chinese characteristics" into their message. Their incorporation of Confucian values makes them "patriotic" by virtue of the latter's endogenous roots.

This is certainly the case of Islam in its sinophone formulation, as embodied by the theological meanings produced by traditional Chinese language scholarship. Still perceived to some degree as an "imported" doctrine, in spite of its millennial presence in the country, Islam in its endogenous Hui-Ru reinterpretation proved better suited to offer Muslims a sustainable paradigm of orthodoxy than any foreign alternative, by virtue of its "Chinese characteristics."

To the contrary, promoting foreign discourses deprived of such "characteristics" would necessarily leave room for frictions between their message and local agendas inspired by the construction of a "harmonious society," such as the one invoked by CCP propaganda throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this view, any foreign interpretation of Islam devoid of connection with Chinese cultural values would pose a possible threat to Islam's sustainability on Chinese soil. This is especially true of doctrinal paradigms inspired by Arabo-centrist mindsets. For these reasons, cadres involved in crafting the teaching curricula of Chinese Muslim religious professionals would stay vigilant to any insertion of such inputs into the training program. State-sponsored and traditional Islamic education hence ended up converging towards an Islamic doctrinal paradigm inspired by regionalism, infused with "Chinese characteristics" and skeptical of most forms of exogenous tradition, making it difficult for Arabo-centrist influences to acquire long-term currency in China.

In closing, the emergence of Arabo-centrist approaches to Islamic law and theology in modern China would necessarily be limited by a variety of doctrinal and contextual variables. While an increasing vulnerability to Arabo-centrist worldviews can be found in Chinese Muslims' enhanced exposure to the Middle East since the 1990s, cultural forces rooted in context and tradition privilege interpretations of Islam informed on regionalism and endogenous discourses (Dicks 1990; Erie 2016). At the core of such outcome stands Chinese *ulama's* understanding of genealogy and transmission as key measures of orthodoxy. These forces, clearly at work in the

Sanzijing genre as well as in the *Han Kitab* canon at large, exert a continuous impact on contemporary Chinese Islamic scholarship. The end result is that Islamic law and theology in China reached a place of enhanced autonomy *vis-à-vis* foreign debates.⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated Chinese Muslims' historical response to the foundational question "what makes a Muslim, Muslim?" To local *ulama*, being Muslim entailed acknowledging a unified pattern of ritual worship codified through the five pillars of Islam, while partaking in an evolving debate over the best way to comply with one's moral responsibilities towards society in accordance to Islamic principles identified and analyzed at a regional level. In addition to strictly ritualistic prescriptions pertinent to the performance of Islamic worship, social norms could be negotiated within the cultural boundaries of a Chinese-speaking community, whose intellectual genealogy maintained connection to the earliest revelation of Islam in Mecca via filiative genealogies of doctrinal knowledge. Here "ritual matters," to the extent that being "Muslim" in China entails being part of a local community prone to emphasizing the relevance of ritual practice and intellectual genealogies as foundational measures of Islamic orthodoxy. At the same time, local "community matters" to the extent that these very genealogies placed the local community at the center of a theological debate that led to the creation of an endogenous pattern of Islamic theology that is regionalist in its essence, ubiquitous in its distribution, and inherently suspicious towards Arabo-centrist approaches to doctrinal authenticity.

Notes

- 1 References to women's involvement with Islamic scholarly networks can be found in Benite 2005 and Previato 2020. Jaschok and Shui 2000 offers a comprehensive reconstruction of women's historical entanglement with local Islam.
- 2 Most of my fieldwork for the *Sanijing* genre took place in 2010.
- 3 The aforementioned texts detailed scholarly networks active to the circulation of Islamic knowledge in China, carrying records of the name and biographies of major imams involved in such enterprise, along with their connection to one another. These works stand as a modern testament to the pivotal role played by "community" in the transmission and development of Islam. They also reflect ongoing concern for identifying the people involved in the network.
- 4 The label *Jingling Xuepai*, i.e. Nanjing school of Islamic law, appeared in the logo of a large academic gathering on Islamic law organized in Nanjing in 2010. The logo, accompanied by the Arabic transcription *madrassa nanjiniyya*, sparked debates among scholarly circles concerned with the appropriateness of dedicating a distinct school to Liu Zhi's teaching, labeling it after his hometown Nanjing and treating it as an independent outgrowth of Hanafi jurisprudence (Tsafrir 2004).

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THE “MORAL BACKGROUND” OF WORK IN CENTRAL ASIA

The sacred in the mundane

Jeanine Dağyeli

The core term in any description of traditional conceptions of work in Central Asia is *kasb*. Conventionally, *kasb* is often translated as craft (and this article largely follows this usage for convenience), but this is only one of its aspects. Besides crafts, various services, trade, agriculture, stockbreeding, and artistic professions were equally considered *kasb*. Literally, the term denotes a gainful occupation. Yet, not every income-generating activity would have classified as *kasb*. The claim to be a *kosib*, a person rightfully engaged in a *kasb*, needed to be furnished with publicly acknowledged apprenticeship and ritual transition to the master status that was sanctioned by the vocational trainer. *Kasb* also implied a certain degree of physical labor, and usually professions called thus would have had their *risāla*, or code of conduct (see Dağyeli 2011a: 13, 212–214; 2011b: 76 for details).

Work is probably not the first sphere to come to mind when thinking about religiosity, piety, and morality in daily life. Yet, what we perceive as (legitimate and licit) work, which values we think should govern work, and what kind of behavior we expect from those engaged in certain professions, are imbricated with religious convictions and prescriptions. These are often not spelled out explicitly, but inform work routines, best practices, and taboos, and separate the legitimate from the objectionable. Abend (2014) has called these underlying, sometimes unconscious values that govern the way we work, our “moral background.”

This chapter examines this idea of the religious, moral, background as it played out in Muslim, pre-socialist Central Asia, and it analyzes its core values, some of which are still salient today. Its discussions rest upon two different sets of sources. One is the literary genre of codices of conduct from the Central Asian crafts’ milieu, popular between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries (Persian: *risāla-yi kasb*/Turki: *kasb risālası*). These serve as a vantage point to explore conceptualizations of work-related morality, piety, and ethos. A second strand of information comes from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in different places in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan between 2006 and 2011.¹ This analysis allows us to trace longer-term mentalities and how these played out practically in values and comportment throughout very different polities between the late nineteenth century and today. Islamic stipulations, for example, are assumed to have suffered under socialism on the whole. Looking at the labor sector reveals that while certain religious manifestations were abandoned or went into hiding in the face of an omnipresent, repressive state, others remained relatively unharmed in the guise of folklore,

or even met with socialist ideals. Furthermore, this chapter is an attempt at overcoming conventional, analytical boundaries between economy and religion by showing that, based on primary sources from the region, this separation does not represent thought and practice in Central Asia (Eren Tasar, in this volume, examines the persistence of religion in the private lives of Soviet Muslims).

Work in pre-socialist Central Asia was not a purely mundane activity, but part of an integrated socio-cosmic field (Hardenberg 2017: 9). This term seeks to overcome the frequent distinction between the religious and economic domains, by focusing on valued relationships as expressed in exchange and provisioning within and between the natural and supernatural worlds. In the context at hand here, it is used to capture the multi-dimensionality of work-related knowledge and processes, and their entanglements with the more-than-mundane. Thinking about Central Asian work with socio-cosmic fields enables us to see the simultaneousness of mundane and sacred capacities of a workshop, or of teaching one's apprentice. The Central Asian workscape, to play with Appadurai's (1991) famous neologism, lived on the conceptualization that mundane labor originated in, and was thus legitimated by, the sacred. The spirits of earlier masters and apical ancestors of the craft, often prophets, guarded and blessed the work, and were commemorated and ritually nourished in return by the living craftspeople. These entanglements of work and spirituality are what formed the socio-religious field. It was a rhizomic net of reciprocal relations maintained by exchange and mutual dependency across the human-non-human spectrum. The "moral background" in the labor milieu was fed by these socio-religious entanglements and their ontological, fundamental questions.

The conceptual divide between the economic and religio-ritual spheres that developed into a commonsensical truth in post-enlightenment Western Europe permeates much of the hegemonic, global thought, even in academia, in spite of unremitting evidence put forth by anthropologists that attests to the otherwise (e.g., Bourdieu 2000; Graeber 2011; Gudeman 1986; 2001; Gudeman and Hann 2015; Hardenberg 2017). Where the socio-cosmic field is acknowledged, it is often perceived as a hindrance to be overcome on the path towards a more rational economic development (compare Bourdieu 2000). Max Weber's thoughts on Islam and economy remained incomplete but he, too, apparently regarded the Islamic constituency as an obstacle for the transition to rational capitalism (Schluchter 1999). Weber recognized, however, that this "obstacle" resulted less from religion itself than from an unlucky conjuncture of state and religious institutions, and pointed to the Tatar "modern" entrepreneurs in Russia as a positive counterexample (Djedi 2011: 44). In the modernist zeitgeist of the mid-twentieth century, the Turkish economist Sabri Ülgener, himself from a family of Sufi notables and well acquainted with Sufi work ethics, criticized the conspicuous religious detachment from worldly affairs as pious facade and an obstacle for the development of a modern economy in Turkey (Ülgener 2006a; 2006b). Weber, on the other hand, saw Sufi brotherhoods as one possible civil society actor impregnated with the necessary "inner-worldly asceticism" to make an economic transition (Djedi 2011: 44).

Islamic values as "moral background" have rarely been explored, although there has been a rising number of publications that deal with "Islamic economy," especially in the banking sector (see Kuran 1995; Stephan-Emmrich 2021; Wilson 2009 for critical reviews; Khan in this volume). For Central Asia, questions concerning the practical implementations of Islamic normative prescriptions in economic affairs across the centuries, and the way these have influenced the "moral background" have hardly been asked so far. First attempts at a translocal comparison from Central Asia remain modest and on the normative side so far, but they are a start (Ganiyev, Shakeel Shah, and Ayaz 2017).

The scripturalization of a vernacular genre: The codices of conduct for craftsmanship (*risāla*)

Risāla-texts (*risāla-yi kasb/kasb risālasī*) are manuals for craftspeople that narrate the mythical beginnings of their profession, and give spiritual advice in work-related affairs (see Dağyeli 2011a). They were transmitted orally as well as in small booklets, and consisted of moral admonitions, exempla stories, sacred genealogies, and prayers that should accompany certain work steps. Divine benison (*barakat*) is promised to those who work according to the rules, while those who don't are threatened by the prospective dire consequences that they will face on Resurrection Day. These texts are one of the few sources originating in, and targeted at, the pre-socialist crafts' milieu. Even if they were usually not written by craftspeople themselves but rather by mullahs and other literates, the knowledge disseminated by these handbooks was widely popular, and has survived in proverbs and rituals until today. All of the texts are deeply imbued with Sufi conceptualizations of work, spirituality, proper comportment, and divine grace.

The *risāla*-genre is unique to wider Central Asia; any comparative effort remains unsatisfactory and superficial (e.g., Atadjanova 2009 on European guild laws). The world created by the *risāla* reached latitudinally from Khurasan (in what is today eastern Iran) to north-western South-Asia (the historical Hindustan) and the Tarim basin (historical Altishahr), and longitudinally from Afghanistan into the Kazakh steppe and the Zhetysu-Ili region, across a variety of languages, environments, persuasions, and modes of livelihood. By bestowing religious legitimacy and value upon daily, work-related activities, it created a shared reference frame for individuals and professional groups, and forged moral, symbolic, and conceptual commonalities. In the agro-pastoral interface of Central Asia, attempts at defining which social groups the recipients of the texts came from seem futile. There is clear indication that the *risāla* was predominantly an urban, sedentary phenomenon, possibly because ritual performances noteworthy enough to leave a record were contingent upon a critical mass of craftspeople from the same profession in one area.

The absence of written texts tells, however, little about the dissemination of work-related religious knowledge in rural and peripheral areas, or about the gradual transition of knowledge along the oral-literary continuum. The *risāla* is a gender-specific text directed at the male professional, hence the male-form "craftsman" will be used in most instances throughout this chapter. This does not suggest that women were not part of the workforce in *kasb*-professions. Their contribution is well attested, historically as well as today. The work-related "moral background," however, allots them only a very marginal role.

Texts that have come down to us stem from some 40 professions. Although they vary considerably within and across professions, they draw from a shared pool of sacred narratives. The first motion in starting a profession is usually made by a prophet who appeals to God for help with some urgent problem, be it Ādam who asks how to cook, Mūsā (Moses) who wants some sheep for herding, or Ibrāhīm (Abraham) whose sheep grow too much wool while he does not know how to shear them and produce felt. In reaction, God sends the angel Jabra'īl (Gabriel) in order to teach the prophet the appropriate craft. This initiation sets the model for any further transmission and dissemination of the profession. The respective master is turned into an attorney of the original prophet who is venerated as the spiritual leader (*pīr*). The profession itself, as well as the act of teaching, are sanctified by divine intervention.

The authoritative voice of the *risāla* rests on the combination of Qur'anic verses, personage from the early Islamic history that is linked to a craft, guidance for proper, moral behavior as a

craftsman, and eschatological scenes that illustrate the outcomes of one's choices made during a lifetime:

If [the craftsman] pays respect to this *risāla*, he will find esteem. If he does not do so, he shall remain in baseness (*iplāslīk*). On resurrection day, his two [sides of the] face shall be black. He shall be ashamed in front of the *pīrs*. God the Most Exalted shall pardon everyone who applies this *risāla* of the sins he committed.

IVR RAN B 1900/2, fols. 15a–15b

The *risāla* lays claim to scriptural authority by producing several arguments. The texts aver that they originate with God who sent them along with Jabraʿīl in the initial act of teaching the craft. In an obvious, structural analogy of the revelation of the Qurʾan, the *risāla* is presented as a text revealed to a prophet, only that the prophet in this case is not the founder of a religion but the founder of a profession:

The venerable Jabraʿīl said: O Dāwūd [David], God's deputy (*khalīfat Allāh*), this is a *risāla* and it was brought for you and your community (*umma*) so the masters succeeding you will work according to this *risāla*.

Or. oct. 1710, 75–76

The divine origin of the text is still part of the cultural memory of those Central Asian craftsmen who own a *risāla* (see Dağyeli 2011a: 63). Besides citing short verses from the Qurʾan and the occasional mentioning of a *hadith* (often without providing it), the *risāla* is largely self-referential. The knowledge presented in the texts is said to be the relevant Islamic knowledge tailored to the group of *kasb*-professionals. If they abide by the *risāla*, keep the book with themselves, read the text and listen to its recital, they have not only provided for the Last Judgement, but have also fulfilled the equivalent of other canonical or recommended duties. One *risāla*, a *risāla* of grocery, stipulates that abiding by its rules was equal in spiritual merit (*thavāb*) to making the *hajj* 100 times, reciting the complete Qurʾan (*khatm-i Qurʾān*) 100 times, donating 100 *dirham*, and liberating slaves (IVRUz-1 3081/3, fol. 57b).

The spiritual merit and promise latent in the *risāla* grants access to the more-than-mundane within the socio-cosmical field. The different, yet simultaneous frames in which work can be read is exemplified by the dual understanding of the workshop as a mundane and sacred space. In daily work routine, the workshop (*korxona*) is an unspectacular place. Many individual workshops are rather small, not always well lit, and scattered with tools, raw material, and residuals. Labor is sometimes sudatory. In a different frame, this same workshop is considered the house of the patron of the profession (*pirxona*), the apical founder-prophet who initiated the profession. This second reading demands certain deferential behavior from the craftsmen, for example not to swear or drink alcohol in the workshop even if they would drink elsewhere (Dağyeli 2011a: 190–191).

The semiotics of licit work

It is April 2006. I stay with a family in Kulob, a town in southern Tajikistan, to conduct interviews on craftsmanship and work-related rituals in town. The weather is already hot, making outdoor physical labor strenuous. Each day, we would get up around 4 a.m. The mother Dilrabo with whom I share the living room for sleeping would turn on the TV and disappear for her ritual ablution and morning prayer. Usually, I doze off again, trying to ignore

the blaring TV voice and the occasional shouts of Dilrabo towards her 17-year-old daughter Mohidil who was, like me, still sleepy. The reason why my host family got up so early was not solely, maybe not even primarily, because of the ritual prayer the parents observed. Mohidil, for example, did not pray, nor did her younger brothers, as far as I could observe. It was because of work.

The family owned a garden plot next to their house, and the main work there had to be finished before it became too hot and everyone left for their paid jobs, at around 10 a.m. Interestingly, this gardening was not perceived as real work because it was directed at the self-sufficiency of the family but not income-generating (compare Féaux de la Croix 2014). My hosts came from a well-respected family in town. The father, Sardor, already a pensioner, ran a small handicraft manufactory; the mother had worked in the local museum. They considered themselves religious in a traditional understanding, which to them meant that, being elderly, they had started to pray some years ago, and they had raised their six children with respect towards their parents. Their eldest son Bahrom, who was married and had a small child, lived in a separate house on the same premises. He did odd jobs and had his own garden plot, but was increasingly unhappy with his economic situation. During my stay, he talked to me as often as possible about business opportunities, what kind of business to best set up, how to run it, which goods to import from where, and how to sell them. One morning, Bahrom told his father about his ambitions while they were weeding the garden. The father was upset: “You cannot do trade (*biznes*) without lying, this is not pure work (*kori toza*),” he said and was strictly opposed to his son entering such an occupation. Other people I talked to also rejected *biznes* which they characterized as an excessive interest in gain as opposed to an interest in quality, the hallmark of a true craftsman.

The word *biznes* entered the Central Asian languages from English via Russian, and conveys an undertone of shady profiteering, informality and being on the fringe of legality. The public perception of trade is very much shaped by the predatory form capitalism took in the 1990s throughout the former Soviet Union. Interestingly, a semantic difference is made to distinguish this kind of “new” trade (*biznes*) from more traditional conceptions of trade (*savdo*). With such negative attributions, many traders feel strong external and internal pressure to legitimize their job and emphasize their moral self.

Traders resort to different strategies to underline their moral standing. One strategy centers around the religiously imbued notion of pure or impure commodities that are sold. Basically, all consumer goods are imported, but not all products are equivalent, even if they are of one kind. In the market, they are advertised with a hierarchy in mind that reflects sentiments about the physical and metaphysical quality of the products. On a top level, there are commodities from Gulf countries (Dubai often serves as an umbrella term for this), Turkey, and Egypt. Russian products are also generally conceived of as good. A young man in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, who otherwise studied jurisprudence and worked as a shoe vendor in the bazaar for sustenance, characterized his choice for goods accordingly:

I only want to sell pure (*toza*) products. There are many who sell shoes from China and people buy them because they are cheap. But I rather sell shoes from Russia or Turkey because they are purer.

As echoed by him, on the bottom line of the hierarchy of value were products from China, although an intricate difference may be made between Chinese goods produced in eastern and central China for Chinese consumption, and those produced in Xinjiang or similar border regions for export to Central Asia. The latter are usually considered of the worst quality.²

The gender issue also plays a part in the often negative valuation of traders. Post-Soviet business milieux in Muslim majority republics are strongly male-dominated, as Heyat (2002: 19) showed for Azerbaijan. In search for allegedly indigenous patterns of organizing society, women are often discouraged from working outside of the house, let alone from going to other towns or even countries to conduct business there. Women engaged in shuttle trade inevitably have to leave the country regularly, often in the company of strange men, and this gives rise to all kinds of moral allegations. The vulnerability of traders, especially female traders, to moral allegations results in a number of strategies to enhance their religious-moral standing. Among these are a conspicuously displayed Muslim habitus that nods to traditional expectations of female comportment, but that more importantly formulates an aspiration for participation in an alternative modernity that is truly Islamic. It equally turns away from Western (read Russian) concepts of modernity and traditional Muslimness that is interpreted as customary (*urf-odat*) instead of properly Islamic (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016: 160). Concomitant effects such as a rise of a new, translocal Muslim professionalism or religiosity as a determinant of professional choices remain as yet to be studied (Derichs and Stephan-Emmrich 2016).

Although the private sector was officially discouraged during most of the Soviet era, trade in the form of *biznes* was no new phenomenon in early post-socialist Central Asia. By the mid-1960s, a rapidly growing informal economy had evolved in parallel with a growing consumerist orientation and the failure of the state-controlled sector to satisfy these needs. Consumerism at that time increasingly testified to prestige, modernism and good personal networks without which many consumer goods would not have been available (Koroteyeva and Makarova 1998: 581). By the 1980s, the private sector had become an indispensable if shady counterpart of state supply, the latter failing especially in the distribution of goods and services tailored to local demand (Gomart 2003: 96). This grey market included goods and services for local consumption, and often centered around life-cycle or other religious events. Since this business turned out not to be controllable by the state, marketing itself was branded as immoral. This judgement tied up to the frustrations of many people who experienced the exorbitant prices and thus imagined the gains potentially realized in this business to be immense (Humphrey and Mandel 2002: 1).

When regarding trade in the private sector in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, we have to bear in mind that "Soviet" was not an invariant signifier. Koroteyeva and Makarova call the cultural environment and Soviet patterns of Central Asia "a stable hybrid of Soviet and traditional Muslim institutions and practices" – the "real legacy of the Soviet regime in Central Asia" which continues to be influential (Koroteyeva and Makarova 1998: 579). Among the traditional Muslim practices they refer to are those shaped by the *risāla*.

Trade and commerce have deep roots in Central Asia, a region that generated wealth predominantly through trade in pre-socialist times. Trading was once among the most prestigious and high-status professions in Muslim, sedentary, urban Central Asia (cf. Heyat 2002: 21). Indeed, what comes to mind even today when thinking of this region and cities like Samarkand and Bukhara is the famous Silk Road, a network of ancient trade routes that deeply shaped the cultural landscape and serves today as a brand mark for the tourist industry.

The religious perspective on trade was ambiguous, however: on the one hand, Islam provides an undisputed and highly legitimizing role model with the Prophet Muhammad himself who was engaged in trade in his early life. His proverbial honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness are also advocated as moral standard for aspiring Muslim entrepreneurs today (Mohd Zahid et al. n.d., Siti nurhasanah C.STMI 2015). Interestingly, the equally possible female role model of Muhammad's first wife Khadija, who was already a trader before she brought him into her business enterprise is not actualized in a comparable way. Most articles simply gloss over her

while her potentiality as a role model remains dormant. Beyond the scope of the individual tradesperson, business is depicted as a service to one's family and to society at large, both highly valued aims (e.g. Zulkifli and Saripuddin 2015). Usually, these advocates argue with canonical Arabic Islamic sources to underscore their concepts of a specific Islamic work ethic (see for example Yeboah-Assimiah 2014). I argue, however, that for daily comportment, practical knowledge of ethical labor principles and, to speak with Abend, the "moral background" of work, popular genres in vernacular language varieties (like the *risāla*) were more influential than scriptural references. This said, it is not my aim to suggest an artificial and ultimately untenable contrast between "high Islam" and "popular Islam," a misrepresentation that permeates much of the earlier scholarship on Central Asia. The term "vernacular genres" rather serves as an umbrella term for texts in local language varieties that were in close communication with canonical texts but modelled on local or regional cultural expectations of how the sacred manifests itself in the world.

Like other professional groups in pre-socialist Central Asia, traders also had their specific, trade-related *risāla*. A text with an unusually well documented provenance is a *risāla* of trade from the holdings of Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent (IVRUz 256). According to the notes in the bookcase, the book originated in nineteenth-century Bukhara. At some point it changed hands and was acquired by a trader from Kokand, then capital of the Khanate of Kokand in the Ferghana Valley. This trader was apparently engaged in trade with Bukhara. When discovered in the archive some years ago, the book still wore its blue and white striped cotton book-jacket which is an indication that this was a much-consulted book that was valuable to its owner, hence it was protected by the cover. The *risāla* itself is bound together in the book with other texts of mixed spiritual and practical content. One of the other texts that speaks closely to the *risāla* is a treatise on travelling. According to this text, if the trader complies with his *risāla*, the journey is going to be smooth. Dangers and annoyances specific to Bukhara are also pointed out, such as how to avoid getting infected with the guinea worm (*rishta*), a waterborne pest Bukhara was notorious for.

Trade dominated the whole city of Bukhara in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bazaars specialized in all kinds of commodities, and services merged with workshops and ordinary houses, stretched into and crosscut residential areas. The exact number of caravanserais that housed traders, animals, and goods from all over Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, South Asia, Russia, and the Arabian Peninsula is not known. Estimates range from 38 in the mid-nineteenth century to more than 60 in the early twentieth century (Sukhareva 1966: 54–56). A proverb from northern Afghanistan captures both the self-esteem and the upper position in the social hierarchy of work traders laid claim to: first the trader, then the craftsman, then the day laborer (*avval dukondor, boz kasbu kor, boz mardikor*) (Centlivres 1972: 157). It sets trade aloof of all other skilled work (*kasbu kor*), differently from the *risāla* that treats trade as a *kasb*, however a prestigious one.

The economic importance of trade and the positive role model of the prophet Muhammad notwithstanding, the profession held an ambivalent position in the moral-religious perspective of Central Asia. Trade and commerce were perceived as morally dubious. Their locale, the bazaar, although frequented by virtually everyone, allegedly encouraged morally appalling behavior like lucre and avarice, and paved the way for submitting to one's appetitive soul (*nafs*), responsible for profit seeking (Dağyeli 2011a: 191–192). In Sufi perception, *nafs* is the seat of blameworthy characteristics of any human being, a stage a person has to overcome in order to detach oneself from the material world and develop into a real devotee. Markets were viewed as arenas for fraud and filth in every sense of the word. Filth was regarded as an internal and external problem, especially among reform-oriented intellectuals. In the early

twentieth-century newspaper *Bukhārā-yi šarīf* (Bukhara the Noble), a number of letters to the editor decry the poor, unhygienic condition of Bukhara's streets and bazaars, and their authors especially argue against holding bazaars in front of mosques and madrasas, which were a popular locale for markets (Reichmuth 2004: 66–71).

In religious-moral perception, there were a number of reservations against the bazaar: besides fraud, voracity, and overreaching, different *risāla*-texts invoke the problem of permissible food. The texts state that it was religiously illicit (*harām*) to eat in the bazaar since the food might have been prepared by an impure or untrustworthy person. This is obviously a reflection of Sufi debates about the ritual purity of food. As practice-oriented advice literature for people who work in the bazaar every day, and can hardly avoid food consumption there, the *risāla* also offers a loophole. Anticipating that their addressees might not be able to comply with the ban on eating in the market, some texts ask their owner to recite specific Qur'anic verses to make religiously permissible the food and drink that is consumed in the market. Additionally, a prayer asking for succor from the Prophet Muhammad was due when entering the bazaar in the morning to prevent harm, since the devil was supposed to be the first one to enter these premises, and the last one to leave.

The question of the permissibility of food concerned more than the individual consumption of comestible goods. Food intake also symbolized religiously permitted or prohibited behavior per se.

Everything a trader, who does not know the sixty-seven patron-saints [of his profession] and who does not have the *risāla* with him in written form, profits [literally: eats] from this trade (*az ān kasb khūrad*), will be illicitly consumed (*harām khūrda*), as bad as if he ate a [piece of] pork (*gūsh-t-i khūk*).

IVRUz 256, fol.

As can be seen from this *risāla*-text, food was an allegory for earning one's livelihood, and livelihood from trade could only be earned in a legitimate way if it was entangled with religiously sanctioned knowledge and behavior.

What is stressed here besides the religious knowledge, is the demand made on each trader to keep with him the *risāla* as a material object in order to work in a religiously permissible way. The booklets were valued as text and object. They should always be kept about the person or at the workshop, and served simultaneously as scripture and amulet. Ideally, even the possession of a *risāla* turned a craftsman into a professional aloof of illegitimate behavior, and possessing such a book bestowed social capital and divine benison (*barakat*) upon its owner. Through performative verbal and non-verbal communication acts (prayers, amulet properties), the texts aimed at transforming the world of their proprietors by magical means (cf. Assmann 2010: 25). The *risāla* was also a token for others, by which they could assess the religious aspirations of a craftsman because holding a *risāla* demanded certain, pious behavior.

Ethics embodied: Adab, labor and its spiritual topography

The *risāla* has often been misconceived as a practical guide to craftsmanship, a kind of instruction book reiterating work steps and tools needed accordingly (e.g. Dzhabbarov 1971: 132, Atadjanova 2003). When reading the texts, it becomes obvious that their primary concern is not a practical introduction to the respective craft – the instructions are much too patchy for that – but that they offered religiously underpinned guidance to craftspeople regarding work ethics, etiquette, manners, and habitus; in short, all the positively connoted traits subsumed by

the word *adab*. *Adab* as a set of normative, “civilized” behavior and habitus has a long, complex history in the Muslim world (see Gabrieli 1986; Ridgeon 2018; Rozehnal 2019). In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Central Asia, its understanding is both shaped and attested by stipulations in the *risāla*. The ensuing aspects of ethics and etiquette have inward and outward aspects (see Dağyeli 2018: 219), and correspond to Sufi understandings of modesty, self-regulation, and restraint on the ego (*nafs*). These are usually enumerated as religiously compulsory (*vājib*) acts:

What things are *vājib*: First, to be [in the state of ritual] purity (*ṭahārat*), second, to say prayers and *takbīr* for the souls of the [passed away] masters and *pīrs*, third, to show assiduity and eagerness (*jad-u jahd va ṭalab*) for the necessities (*darkārḥā*) [of work?], fourth, to show mercy and clemency (*rahm va shafqat*) from within [your] heart, fifth, to stroke a clement hand over the head of orphans [i.e. to be charitable], sixth, to love erudites, seventh, to be honest (*ṣādiq*), that means to put the righteous forward (*rāsī-rā peshā kardan*), eighth, to be acquiescent (*ṣābir*), that means be frugal (*qanāʿat*) with everything that comes from God, ninth, to fulfil the command of God, the Most Exalted, tenth, to be always charitable (*bā ṣaḥāvat*), that means to be beneficent (*kḥayr kardan*) towards the poor and needy (*faqīrān va masakīnān*), eleventh, to pray the [obligatory] prayer five times in community, to refrain from the illicit (*ḥarām*) and doubt (*shubḥa*).

IVR RAN 1900/25, lines 45–51

While this example shows concern with spiritual, inward comportment of the craftsman that remains invisible to his environment, other passages demand *adab* in his interactions with customers, fellow craftspeople and the general public. Important passages also regulate his behavior in and towards the workshop and his tools. This becomes understandable if we consider that the workshop is the dwelling of the *pīr*, and the tools are presented to the nascent first craftsmen by God, often taken from paradise. Thus, the craftsman needs to keep the workplace clean, enter and work with *adab*, and treat the tools with respect because they are copies after the first prototype, and carry blessing (Dağyeli 2011a: 69, 89, 191).

The *risāla* was not about theoretical knowledge. The texts remind the craftsman to practice its rules routinely. The reputation of a craftsman was contingent upon performance of *adab*; his actions had to be witnessed and validated by social recognition. Speaking with Abend (2014: 17), *adab* constituted a second-order element that informed notions of morality and proper behavior, and guided the craftsman towards their enactment in daily life. The denigration of gain, benevolence, modesty, honesty, and a preference for spiritual affairs over worldly ones that the *risāla* demanded, were further emphasized through the spiritual lineages of the founding prophets.

Most *risāla*-texts have at least one section that lists names of prominent figures from the Islamic history and mythology who are credited with the advancement and dissemination of professions. The lists resemble Sufi genealogies, the so-called *silsila*, that trace a spiritual line down to its apical founder. In the *risāla*, the names mentioned as ancestors in the craft’s tradition, range from Qur’anic and pre-Qur’anic prophets, companions of the prophet Muhammad and similar historically documented figures, to mythical beings or unattested persons. The common origin from one apical founding prophet builds a kin-like structure for each professional community. In this cosmos, the craftsmen are conceptually brothers, while their professional predecessors become fathers and forefathers, ultimately linked to saintly figures of Islamic hagiography.

If someone asks, how many perfect spiritual leaders (*pīr-i kāmīl*) have passed in this art (*hunar*) of building, answer: 360 perfect spiritual leaders have passed. ... Among them passed seventy-two spiritual leaders [who were] masters. All [of them] were [of] utmost reputation. First, ‘Abd al-Jalīl Mashriqī, second, ‘Abd al-Raḥman Shimālī, third, ‘Abd al-Karīm Maghribī, fourth, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Janūbī, fifth, Shamsuddīn Tamarqandī [= Samarqandī], sixth, Nūreddīn Mashriqī, seventh, ‘Abd al-Raḥman Miyānkālī, eighth, ‘Abd al-Sattār Khāqānī, ninth, ‘Abd al-Qaḥḥār Kūhistānī, tenth, ‘Abīdiddīn Bukhārī, eleventh, Nūreddīn Kāshgharī, twelfth, ‘Abd al-Jalāl Balkhī, thirteenth, ‘Abdullāh Ḥiṣārī, fourteenth, ‘Abd al-Vāḥid Kulābī, fifteenth, Kh^vāja Aḥmad Turkeṣtānī. After them, it [the craft] was transmitted from generation to generation, from one to the other.

risāla of the building craft, N° 5694, p. 61

The names listed here display several categories of socio-cultural orientation that are typical in these texts. The first four are nondescript names with Arabic sobriquets (*nisba*) for the four cardinal points, east, north, west, and south. What follows are possibly also generic figures whose main function mainly lies in mapping the socio-cosmic space. The one exception is the last figure, Aḥmad Turkeṣtānī, who is most probably Aḥmad Yasāvī, apical figure of the Yasāvī Sufi order. The topography that is evoked here encapsulates core places of urban civilization in southern Central Asia, from Kashghar in the east to Bukhara in the west, and from Turkestan in the north to Balkh in the south. It pays tribute to the fertile lowland between Samarkand and Bukhara (the Miyānkāl) and the highland (Kūhistān). In comparison with other texts, the world unfurled here is comparatively parochial, though, as a second example will show:

If someone asks: How many perfect spiritual leaders (*pīr*) existed [in the smith's craft] before Muḥammad Muṣṭafā PBUH? Answer: there were twelve perfect ones. The first was the *pīr* Dāvūd PBUH, the second was Yūnus PBUH, the third was the venerable Jālūt PBUH, the fourth was the venerable Idrīs PBUH, the fifth was Ṭūsī, the sixth was Fāzil Shāmī, the seventh Ustā-yi Ṣāḥib al-Dīn, the eighth Bābā Samāsī, the ninth Kh^vāja Firdaus, the tenth Kh^vāja Khurdak, the eleventh Kh^vāja Mas‘ūd, [and] the twelfth Maṣṣūr. They all were renowned throughout the world.

IVRUz-1 12708/1, fols. 19a–20a

In this text, the conceptual affiliations are initially dominated by prophets, thereby pointing to the sacred history, and geographically to the Arab world as the Islamic epicenter. With Ṭūsī, probably Najm al-Dīn Ṭūsī, a lesser known teacher of Aḥmad Yasāvī, Fāzil Shāmī, possibly Abū Ishāq Shāmī, apical figure of the Chishtiyya, and Bābā Samāsī, an outstanding figure in the Naqshbandī *silsila* before Bahā‘uddīn Naqshband himself, the *risāla* references three representatives of influential Sufi orders in Central Asia.³ Especially the name of Abū Ishāq Shāmī can be read twofold: on a plain level, his sobriquet Shāmī indicates a connection to Damascus (historically al-Shām) where his family hailed from (Mutīl Imam 2011) and thus again to the Islamic “heartland.” For the initiated who were familiar with his relocation to the Afghan town of Chisht (close to Herat), his name attested to the translocal Sufi networks, the founding period of Sufi orders, and to a node in the sacralized topography connecting Central Asia with the Middle East. Within the genre, a number of persons refer to places in contemporary Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Their names engender an imagined topography. They evoke memories of space, time, and events that attest to the cultural orientation of the *risāla*. As

a sacral text, it is oriented towards the religious origins. Its narratives want to be read as mundane history, but simultaneously as salvific history.

Decoding the references and identifying personages whose names are sometimes incomplete, misspelled, or permuted, is not easy for a contemporary reader. Knowledge about the collective reference system through which historical and mythical figures could once move, is lost. The nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century copies of the texts, with their multiple omissions and spelling mistakes, suggest that by their time, copyists, and probably the audience, were no longer reliably familiar with all of the figures displayed. This does not seem to have been the main point for the recipients of the texts, however. The importance of the crafts' *silsila* was its religious mental mapping. This landscape could be read as a conceptual space that was generated and maintained through the names in the *silsila*. It situated the individual craftsperson in a network of sanctity in which names, concomitant narratives, the spatial and temporal fabric of religious knowledge and practice, educed a topography of sacrality in which shrines and other pilgrimage places served as chronotopes,

Conclusion

The value of the *risāla* for the workscape of Central Asia lay in its role as a mediator between the scripture and mundane necessities. It reflected in vernacular on morals, piety, and proper comportment, and adapted its semiotics to the labor milieu of *kasb*-professions. The textual transmission of the *risāla* has been interrupted in all parts of Central Asia by now. In the early Soviet Union, repression of people who possessed any kind of Arabic-script manuscripts, as well as a complete restructuring of labor organization, put an end to collective recitation and the ritual enactment of the *risāla*. There are not many craftsmen who still own a *risāla*, and attempts to revive the genre with Cyrillic-script editions have not been successful. In Xinjiang, it was still possible to find printed copies at market stalls during the mid-2000s but with the recent clamp-down on Muslim minorities, the fate of this culture is as unclear as that of its bearers. The present state of affairs in Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the *risāla* remains likewise dubious because many of the stipulations in the texts, as well as related rituals of *pīr* veneration and others, were labelled un-Islamic by the Taliban and similar groups.

That does not imply that all of the knowledge conveyed in the texts has been lost. The famous phrase of the fourteenth-century Sufi Baha'uddin Naqshband, "[devote] the heart to the beloved [i.e., God], the hand to work" is today promoted by the Uzbek government to incite economic activity. It is, however, also actively embraced by many *kasb*-professionals who consider themselves religious (compare Louw 2007: 118–119). The phrase means to them that it is possible to work, and at the same time silently and invisibly practice one's religious exercises, which will clean the practitioner from possible evil aspects of labor, like ritual pollution, greed, or cheating.

Even though many craftspeople today do not know what the *risāla* is, they are well aware of fundamental values and principles from the texts. Many can easily name the patron of the craft, emphasize the necessity to work in an honest, "pure" way as shown in the ethnographic example above, and know how apply respect for the *pīr* and righteousness in their daily labor routine. In that respect, the word *risāla* has become independent from the signified.

The proverb *Bu ish xuddi risoladagiday bo'lsin*⁴ ("This work shall be done exactly as [stipulated] in the *risāla*") harks back to the capacity of the texts to remind and maintain, like a repository, norms and values connected to work. This proverb may be used by customers during negotiations with craftspeople, although mostly none of the parties involved would know what a *risāla* is. Apparently, the compliance with religious-moral prescriptions in the *risāla* was considered

equivalent to good, technically qualified, work. In this holistic understanding of work, the inner values of a craftsman translated into, and corresponded to, his external actions.

Of course, there are discrepancies. Then as today, the *risāla* should not be mistaken as a description of how craftspeople actually worked. The texts are rather a repository of the socio-cosmic field lying latent until enacted, a never-reached ideal which one tried and sometimes still tries to live up to (Dağyeli 2018: 228). While it held up models of impeccable piety that were certainly seldom, if ever, reached, its attraction as a genre lies in its promise. The *risāla* was the material assertion of the "permanent possibility" (Graeber 2001: 87) to achieve this ideal.

Notes

- 1 My gratitude goes to Volkswagen-Foundation and Gerda-Henkel-Foundation that made this research possible. All personal names have been changed to preserve anonymity except in the case of publicly known persons.
- 2 These assessments go back to conversations I had in bazaars in Kulob and the Tajik capital Dushanbe in 2006 and 2007, as well as in the Uzbek capital Tashkent where I accompanied a friend in 2012 in her effort to open a shop in a clothes' market. For the intricacies of rating Chinese products, I am grateful to Damesh Satova who is currently writing her MA thesis on female shuttle traders in Kazakhstan and shared this information with me.
- 3 I am grateful to Daniel Beben for advising me on the first two names.
- 4 I owe this proverb to my old friend and colleague Sharifa Tosheva.

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21

PIOUS LIVES OF SOVIET MUSLIMS

Eren Tasar

This chapter's deliberately provocative title, like the chapter as a whole, is meant to spark some discussion about locating Muslim piety in a communist context, and, more specifically, in the atheistically inclined source base that furnishes much of the empirical basis for reconstructing the practice of Islam in the USSR. Surveying the scholarship on Islam in Soviet Central Asia, it becomes clear that the subject of Muslim piety under communism sorely demands reimagination (Eric Schluessel, this volume, similarly rethinks the relationship between Islam and law in China). Through its uncritical recycling of the Soviet emphasis on religion as a "private" or even "underground" endeavor – a thesis first reproduced by Alexandre Bennigsen in his 1959 article "La Famille Musulmane en union Soviétique," with lasting consequences for Western studies of Soviet Muslims through the present day – this scholarship has failed to consider the possibility that the distinction between public and private bears little relevance to actual religious practice in the Soviet period, as one encounters it in virtually all available historical sources (see also Dağyeli in this volume).

In this contribution, I seek to reimagine Muslim piety under communism by deploying Devin DeWeese's suggestion that much of the examination of "religion" in Central Asia exhibits a debilitating myopia:

If we so etherealize religiosity that we exclude a desire for health, economic success, fertility, or social harmony and camaraderie from the range of motivations that can be labelled 'religious,' we have demolished or devalued much of what makes religious practice interesting throughout the world.

DeWeese 2002: 319

Here, then, I extend DeWeese's framework to the body of documentation that represents the single largest source base for the study of Central Asian Islam during Soviet rule: the writings of Central Asians connected to the Soviet state, explicitly dedicated to making observations about Islam. These sources, which all evince an atheistic bias about the Muslim faith's undesirability, offer a vivid glimpse of the role of Muslim piety, on two levels. First, they present us with an opportunity to situate Islamic practices within a communist context, rather than consigning them to the underground of socialist everyday life. Second, they furnish evidence concerning the ubiquity of Muslim piety, in the broadest sense, as a component of life under Late Socialism.

After situating Islam within the context of Brezhnev-era Central Asia, this chapter employs three case studies to gesture to the ways in which Muslims could practice spirituality in ways that could not be imagined as exclusively public or private. It closely analyzes a hypothetical atheistic exchange contained in a Tajik didactic text. Then, the discussion turns to an incident involving the use of amulets in a hospital in rural Turkmenistan. Finally, the analysis engages with adaptations to a particular type of funerary monument in southern Kazakhstan. The case studies rely on three very different scientific atheistic sources, which, for all their differences, share common ground in treating Muslim spirituality as a basic reality of Soviet Central Asian life.

Pious life, private life

We could follow many social scientists in viewing the infinite amount of data concerning Muslim piety under communism as relating exclusively to those strata of the population allegedly least affected by Soviet policies, or as evidence of religion's decline (e.g., Basilov 1987: 16). An alternative reading of this same evidence, however, could also preliminarily situate Muslim piety in a Late Socialist cultural context. Donald J. Raleigh has argued that "the loosening of controls after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956, the cultural Thaw, and the closing down of the Gulag," yielded a renewed emphasis on, and opportunities for, private life for many Soviet citizens. "The strengthening of the nuclear family and mass exodus from communal flats into single-family apartments fortified the private sphere in the Soviet Union" (Raleigh 2012: 274). As he notes, "attitudes toward authority are shaped mostly by the family, which imparts its own values and shapes how individuals respond to circumstances" (Raleigh 2012: 356). Raleigh's findings from conducting interviews with Soviet intellectuals and professionals from Moscow and Saratov who were born in 1949/1950 present points of overlap with Anna Paretskaya's argument about the consequences of Late Socialist consumerism: "independence and self-reliance as opposed to submission and societal supervision; withdrawal into the private sphere versus commitment and contribution to collective living and interests," as well as the availability of goods that "reduced the need to rely on communal services by making 'private space' more usable, comfortable, and desirable" (Paretskaya 2013: 53, 55). Relaxed work demands, an increase in personal income, and the ability to acquire novel goods *po blatu* (informally), by all accounts yielded a less ascetic, more involved family and home life.

In *Soviet Baby Boomers*, Raleigh closely interrogates private life without setting it aside from the public aspects of Soviet existence his informants describe in such great detail: work, bureaucracy, corruption, dress, and the comical lengths one had to go to in order to procure certain goods, such as sausage and alcohol (to name just a few), during the Brezhnev era. Though Raleigh's subjects are a diverse group, they largely share a willingness to speak at length about different aspects of their lives in a flowing narrative that eschews facile compartmentalization. The details of their private lives had important implications for their public behavior and their view of the world they lived in. For example, informants recalled the childhood delight they derived from gifts their parents, relatives, and acquaintances brought from abroad, such as a 3-D View Master and a Philips tape transistor recorder. These curiosities united family members (and sometimes onlookers from neighboring apartments) in an intimate bond of shared fascination, yet, Raleigh argues, also planted seeds of doubt that would, later in life, lead to cynicism, and for some respondents, emigration (Raleigh 2012: 83). Even the most private experiences led people to enact their values in public, and this should come as no surprise, for private life and privacy are not the same thing. Historians can engage with intimate spaces such as the home and family without reifying them, as much as of the scholarship on Soviet Islam has done

with respect to Muslim spirituality. Devotional practices observed in private settings remain devotional, spiritual, and pious even when historical actors carry them into the public spaces of Soviet institutions and communist life. For this reason, the exercise of locating religion in the public or private realms rests on a dichotomy that is false because of its absence in the sources.

Because the settings analyzed by Raleigh differ from the milieux in which one encounters evidence of Muslim piety, the utility of their findings for understanding Central Asian religious life is without doubt constrained. But I wish to foreground the discussion below with Raleigh's arguments about a post-Stalin return to (and rediscovery of) private life because, to date, the study of Soviet Islam has either rested on untenable generalizations about religion "surviving" in private spheres such as the family, or has presented data centered on the public settings which Soviet bureaucrats and their agents could gain access to. In fact, there are grounds for suggesting that the period from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s represents a particular historical juncture offering unique opportunities for a deeper and more holistic engagement with Muslim piety in the family and the home. As I have argued elsewhere, during this period the state's ideological struggle against religion succumbed to a statist impulse of bureaucratization that in key respects brought the social history of Soviet Islam back into the fold of Islamic history, i.e., the authoritarian postcolonial Islamic world (Tasar 2017). Second, and more importantly, beginning in the second half of the 1960s, the Soviet social science apparatus invested heavily into sociological and ethnographic research by Central Asian scholars, much of it explicitly scientific atheistic in motivation (Smolkin 2018: 143).

There are other reasons that the Late Socialist era presents especially compelling circumstances for analyzing religion. Most obviously, the absence of revolutionary violence transformed atheism into a more subtle part of life, one whose influence cannot be disentangled from patterns of social transformation tied to urbanization, education, and industrialization that bear comparison to other, noncommunist settings (Inglehart 1997). No less importantly, from the 1960s onward the practice of Islam occurred in an increasingly consumerized setting. The possibilities for conspicuous consumption generated by the novel phenomena of disposable income and entry to informal markets, access to radio, television, and a growingly sophisticated Russian, Central Asian and international film scene, the availability of cheap book subscriptions by mail – just to name a few of the prominent manifestations of the rise of a "socialist middle class" – is hinted at in virtually every vignette about Islam one might peruse in atheistic sources of the Brezhnev era. For example, in her analysis of consumer culture in Brezhnev-era Uzbekistan, Kathryn Dooley demonstrates that debates about "proper" consumption became closely intertwined with a tacit valorization of religious practices associated with Muslim "traditionalism." While placing religious charlatans in the same category as drunkards and vagabonds, Uzbek satirical cartoons of the 1960s and 1970s represented older Muslims in "traditional" dress, i.e., often wearing veils and sporting white beards, as representatives of a value system diametrically opposed to the corruption, laziness, and capitalist proclivities exhibited by the younger generation. As she writes:

A corollary of the intense disapproval and anxiety over the disruptive effects of contemporary youth culture in the Soviet Central Asian press was that elderly Uzbeks and Kyrgyz increasingly came to stand in not for the backwardness and stubborn intransigence of traditional ways of life, but rather for a set of values that were posited as simultaneously Soviet and rooted in traditional Central Asia virtues: hard work and love of labor, self-restraint and modesty in personal habits, respectfulness and grace in social relationships.

Dooley 2016: 295

Dooley's work points to religion's subtle but steady coloring of the backdrop to everyday life, an unthinkable outcome in earlier Soviet decades (see also Dooley 2016: 304).

Bearing this level of "normalcy" specific to the Brezhnev era in mind, a concerted engagement with Muslim piety under communism holds the promise of mitigating religion's hitherto nearly total monopolization within political history by introducing it as a category of analysis in the social history of Soviet Central Asia. This scholarly "politicization" of Islam reflects the priorities of the Soviet sources which historians have relied upon, as well as the fact that the bulk of historical writing since the 1990s has focused on the Stalinist decades of antireligious repression rather than the period analyzed in this essay. It also stems from the preliminary state of social history scholarship in Central Asian Studies, at least with respect to Islam. Two recent works do offer promising new directions in the study of Soviet Islam as a part of everyday life (Abashin 2015; Frank 2019).

As I have argued elsewhere, the scholarship on Soviet Islam is so imbricated in a literal reading of communist sources on religion that this exercise entails advancing arguments that will strike many readers as obvious or merely as common sense (Tasar 2020). For example, Soviet antireligious propagandists from the 1960s onward lamented the pervasiveness of a devotional practice as matter-of-fact as reciting the *basmala* and placing one's hands to one's face after every meal. Yet the possibility these propagandists took for granted – that religion constituted a central component of the individual, family, and communal spirituality of Central Asians (including many communists) – has yet to register as an object of study in the historiography of Soviet Islam. In my view, an explanation for the "poverty" of the understanding of religion this scholarship exhibits is to be found in its uncritical advancement of the Marxist obsession with ritual as the defining feature of religious life (an outcome closely intertwined with the development of the sociology of religion in Germany, as some Soviet theorists were aware, e.g., Davydov and Osipov 1980).

The implications of reducing religion to the performance of rites are more far-reaching than what meets the eye. On the one hand, there is the scientific atheistic deployment of "observance" as a metric for encapsulating the rise and fall of religiosity, and therefore secularism's progress (Tasar 2017: 323–326). But a more damaging consequence of such a focus on rites is that it sets the stage for ritual's subsumption within the umbrella of identity and ideology. By positing ritual as an appendage to the things that "really" matter – tradition, nationalism, and even (in analyses focused on the 1980s onward) Wahhabism – this approach's adherents steadily divorce themselves from the historical actors whose agency they want to restore, either in the name of "saving" them from Islam, or in a misguided attempt to highlight their worthiness as "modern." The scholarship on Soviet Islam has largely eschewed the possibility that even communist ethnographers took as their point of departure: the possibility of a *Muslim spirituality* under communism. The three settings discussed below presents some avenues towards locating such a spiritual life in atheistic sources.

Setting 1: A hypothetical exchange

Perhaps the most striking feature of the massive archival and ethnographic source base related to Soviet Islam is the near total absence of any reference to religious life in the family (an omission paradoxically responsible for assumptions about the home's "monopolization" of piety). This lacuna, replicated faithfully in the scholarly literature, may very well constitute the principal culprit in the tenacity of assumptions about the "poverty" or "spiritual deficiency" of Muslim religiosity under communism. But the historian need only deploy a bit of creativity, to catch a glimpse of the ways in which religiosity formed a central part of home life.

References to the mundane offer a peek into the pious home lives of Soviet Muslims. Erkimbaev, the Soviet government's religious affairs official for the mountainous province of Tian Shan in Kyrgyzstan in the late 1940s, observed that

it is plain for anyone to see that not only after dinner, but after every meal, the head of each household lifts his hands upward and recites [the words] 'Ila-i Amin,' and demands that guests raise their hands to their faces and say 'Alla-Akbar [sic].'

He further took pains to clarify that members "of all nationalities in the province perform this ceremony, irrespective of their place of employment or Party membership" (TsGA KR 2597/1s/4/412, December 15, 1947). Festive meals held on the two Muslim holidays in the homes of communists attracted particular attention (TsGA KR 2597/1s/12/43, 1948–1949), as did the ubiquity of frying dough (*ait-baursak*) in honor of one's ancestors on these sacred days, a practice whose popularity testified "to the large number of Muslim believers in Kyrgyzstan" (TsGA KR 2597/1s/4/305, October 21, 1947). Erkimbaev's superior reinforced the point by stating that "whenever they are getting started on anything [*kakoe-by delo ne nachinali*], Muslim believers remember their god Allah by intoning *bismillah* ... Many do not view these words in religious terms and recite these prayers for no particular reason" (TsGA KR 2597/1s/12/39–40, 1948–1949). Echoing official conversations of the period about how to measure religiosity, his superior emphasized that the

foundational canons and dogmas of the religion of Islam consist in the daily observance of religious requirements (*namaz* both in the prayer house and alone at home, fasting, holidays, circumcision, *hatmi qur'an*, etc.), as well as accretions to religious rituals, such as *oshi bibi sishanbe*, brewing *sumalak*, performance of the *istisqa* prayer for rain, *dem saluu*, etc.

TsGA KR 2597/1s/7/119, July 1, 1948

This was the gist of his related observation that the definition of a believer

should encompass not only those who regularly attend services in a house of worship, but also those men and women who observe a variety of religious rites at home, including commemorations of the deceased [presided over] by an invited *mulla* and annual memorial feasts...

TsGA KR 2597/1s/7/147, May 21, 1948

These observations by atheistic observers are striking in that their primary purpose is not to emphasize the fact that Muslims practiced Islam at home, but rather to argue that quotidian observance should rightly figure into any estimate of the number of believers. The prevalence of domestic religiosity is taken as a matter of course.

Another atheistic constituency looked at religion in the home from the perspective not of rites and rituals, but of the school. Released in Dushanbe in 1979, S. Abdulazizov's *Training Atheistic Students at School and in the Family* is one of the few Tajik-language publications focused squarely on atheistic propaganda among youth, and the only one I was able to locate, though others surely exist. Its central thesis is that the home, as a religious setting, impedes the tasks of an atheistic institution, namely the school; this was standard fare for such literature of the period (Galitskaia 1971). Yet the work's Tajik provenance and audience leads (or allows) it to discuss the problem in unusual candor and detail. Much of the work deals with laments from educators

about the extent of religious knowledge among schoolchildren; it is the work's concluding section, "Children's Atheistic Education in the Family," that merits particular attention. In this discussion, the atheist authors attempt to contrast "healthy" and "unhealthy" parental responses to questions posed by children pertaining, potentially, to God.

Children who perform [rites such as] lamentation [*nolayu fighon*], prayers against the evil eye [*tarsu vahm*], and seeking protection from darkness [*dojuiyu iltijo*] are in awe of their parents and pepper them with countless questions. Unfortunately, the children receive unhelpful answers to their questions; they are forced to take their questions to knowledgeable persons and believe in their answers

A boy in the sixth to seventh grade asks his mother: Mother, why do they sacrifice cows [on the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice]?

MOTHER: God considers it necessary.

CHILD: Who is He, mother?

MOTHER: Silence! O Heavens!

CHILD: Where does He live?

MOTHER: He resides in the seven heavens.

CHILD: Why does He need our cow?

MOTHER: Don't be a chatterbox: He took a cow that we no longer needed.

CHILD: If you ask Him, will He buy me a nice bicycle?

MOTHER: That's enough, you little devil, or He will strike us all down.

CHILD: But is He even greater than my father?

MOTHER: He is the creator of you and your father.

CHILD: Verily, He is greater than any man!

The insight that emerges from the first exchange is that this is no ordinary Tajik family. Our hypothetical child's reference to the ritual sacrifice of a cow as a matter of course invites educated speculation. As the poorest republic in the USSR, Tajikistan was hardly a setting in which the average Muslim family could afford to sacrifice its own cow, let alone boast possession of "a cow that we no longer need." All livestock was owned by collective farms and ranches, meaning that any use of cattle for private or religious purposes would amount to "theft of socialist property," a major force behind government anticorruption raids throughout Soviet history (on the economic authority exercised by collective farm chairmen, see Abashin 2015: 284–305). Of course, this constraint did not prevent religious rites and rituals (or theft) from taking place across Central Asia's collective farms in a very public manner. The child's casual reference to the possibility of obtaining a bicycle, a coveted and unattainable luxury item for the vast majority of Soviet children, strongly suggests that the child's father (who is absent from the discussion) was an official, and probably the manager, of a collective farm. There are then reasonable grounds for assuming that the conversation involves a communist family in which the head of household nominally subscribes to the Party's atheist ideology. This possibility, in turn, raises several questions: Why does the wife of a Party official subscribe to a clichéd, fire-and-brimstone variety of doomsday religion? Why does a child on the verge of becoming a young adult (presumably somewhere between 12–14 years of age) evince such ignorance about religious/atheistic matters? We need not pass judgment on the viability of such a conversation in Tajikistan around 1970 to comprehend the extent to which the society painted by the text's authors is both communist and pious.

The author then contrasts this hypothetical exchange with another set of interactions, this time involving a child in the fifth to seventh grades:

QUESTION: Mother [*ocha*], where did we find my younger brother?

ANSWER OF AN ATHEIST FATHER: At the hospital, along with two kilograms of apples that we bought.

QUESTION: And did you buy my other brother as well?

ANSWER: When you are older we will buy [you] another nice brother.

ANSWER OF A RELIGIOUS PERSON: God gave us your brother.

QUESTION: Why did my grandmother die?

ANSWER: It is God's work. He has mercy on some and metes out adversity to others.

QUESTION: He tells God Your mercy ended grandma's life, and turned the entire night into a lamentation.

ANSWER: Don't say that or God's curse will fall upon us.

QUESTION: Why does God strike men down?

ANSWER: This is why. (His father curses him and slaps him in the face).

A child who for God's sake does not learn anything, has no choice after this attack but to believe in God and his father.

Abdulazizov 1970: 22–23

The second set of exchanges, juxtaposing an atheist and a religious parent, brings new nuances, and therefore new avenues of potential inquiry, into the picture I want to paint of Muslim piety under communism. It begins predictably enough with a child asking his mother about procreation, a standard feature of atheist didactic literature in postwar Central Asia (Tasar 2017: 84 n. 21). However, it is not the mother who answers, but the father (apparently present as well). All three remain in the room while the father offers a humorous response, familiar to many a Soviet child, about babies being “picked up at the store.” Whatever warm feeling these swift lines nurture in the reader's heart vanishes immediately thanks to the vivid contrast presented by the next exchange, in which a boy's sadness over the death of a much-loved grandmother is met with paternal violence. The father's behavior seems to reflect the cold and unquestioned authority of a distant, unfeeling god. We are thus presented with two caricatured, stylized portraits of a progressive and a reactionary response to questions about life and death. It is the contrast between the exchanges, rather than their slim content, that the authors want to draw our attention to.

What does this contrast between the two scenes – and supposedly contrasting familial milieux – really consist of? Certainly not in the treatment of women. The atheist father either does not allow the mother, to whom the question is addressed, to respond; or she defers to him. In the latter exchange, the boy's mother is not even present. Why, then, introduce the mother at all? Unless the authors made a mistake (and this might be the case), she must be there for a reason. The fact that patriarchy constitutes the one thread binding the two conversations together may be the point. Atheism, in this case, has less to do with denying God, than with being a kindly, patient, and authoritarian father who wants to have more sons. If piety is to be equated with fanaticism, then the authors have successfully proven their point: that atheists are more “progressive” than believers. Yet if we view piety in the broad sense conceptualized by DeWeese, they have done the opposite, by demonstrating the extent to which conceptions of piety (tied, in this case, to patriarchal social norms) permeated Central Asian family life, communist and otherwise.

Although the exchanges' pedagogical intent emerges clearly, a careful examination of the unspoken assumptions undergirding these interactions can unearth several potential insights about religious observance in Central Asian Muslim families. Paolo Sartori has argued that Soviet materials about Islam, including ethnographic texts and bureaucratic correspondence among communists, can be tapped for reflecting a kind of "historicity" as "document[s] including fragments of past realities." Even overtly antireligious texts lend themselves to his call for a "hermeneutic method that allows to appreciate how Central Asians could inscribe their Sovietness into their Islamic episteme and explain how their being Muslim (whatever this meant at the time) was a constitutive component of their being Soviet" (Sartori 2021). Atheistic texts written in Central Asian languages employed by Soviet Muslims can be read not only as a form of propaganda, but as a dynamic site of creativity taking shape in Muslim (and communist) societies, i.e., as a negotiation of Sovietness and Muslimness. Their atheistic intent does not obviate the fact that they rely upon an established social and cultural vocabulary shared by the authors and their intended, Tajik-speaking audience. On this basis it is possible to tease out inferences about family piety in Soviet Tajikistan in the late 1960s. And as for bias, why should the prejudices of atheistic authors writing about Islam be considered more insurmountable than the biases inherent in all historical sources (Louw et al. 2021)?

It is also worth pointing out that the portrayal of religious morality in both exchanges lacks any of the satire or cynicism one might expect in an atheistic source. The reader instead encounters a sober conceptualization of piety that inheres in the recognition of God's powers, that explains the status of a believer as a mortal being who genuflects before God and who, in so doing, accepts his life as *qismat*. The very possibility of such a reading points to the work that needs be done in reconceptualizing Soviet atheistic texts as "religious" sources.

Setting 2: A hospital

The workplace, where Soviet citizens spent a significant portion of their waking hours, remains the missing link in the study of Soviet Islam, the one space which, aside from passing references in a number of ethnographic studies, has not been the subject of any concerted inquiry concerning religion. This lacuna represents a significant missed opportunity, for, as I have argued elsewhere, Soviet institutions presented Islamic personnel (a term employed here in the most liberal sense) with opportunities to facilitate practices and spread their knowledge in communist settings, often in the very process of fulfilling their nominal job duties (Tasar 2018). Allen Frank has tackled this question from a vocational angle, demonstrating that religious personnel released from the Kazakh Gulag, and their children, reproduced longstanding family legacies of adjudicating disputes using Islamic law and practicing traditional medicine into the Late Socialist period as judges and doctors in the employ of the Kazakh SSR (Frank 2019). His argument for the "Islamization" of Soviet institutions after World War II, i.e., for a blending of their Sovietness and Muslimness, can be extended to an analysis of the quotidian interactions that allows us to view the enactment of Muslim piety in specific settings.

In addition to constituting a classic of Soviet ethnographic literature on Central Asia, Sergei Demidov's *Sufism in Turkmenistan* stands out for the fact that its author, an ethnic Russian, spent his entire career in Turkmenistan, living and working there from the summer of 1959 until going into retirement in Russia's Krasnodar Territory in 1998. Fluent in the Turkmen language, and deeply knowledgeable about social life and customs in the vast republic's most far-flung corners, Demidov formed part of an intimate, Turkmen-dominated community of ethnographers based in the Turkmenistan Academy of Science's Ethnography Sector (Demidov 2000). His work combines the attention to empirical rigor for which Soviet ethnography is

rightly famous, and a notable attempt to tone down the prescriptive pronouncements expected of Marxist social scientists. For this reason, it is not surprising to find Demidov's observations echoing criticisms of Muslim fanaticism encountered in atheistic texts written in Central Asian languages.

Unfortunately, a portion of the intelligentsia, which by virtue of its position should participate in struggling against vestiges of the past, adopts a conciliatory attitude toward all kinds of "holiness."

It seems appropriate to mention the following episode by way of example. In December 1973, when a film crew from Turkmen Television was getting ready to take some footage of a waiting room for the sick in the Bäharden district pediatric polyclinic for an atheistic documentary entitled "The Secrets of Amulets," one of the doctors, upon learning about the purpose of the video shoot (which was not kept secret), stood in front of the gate to the building, barring any children and their mothers wearing "holy" talismans from entering. ...For the television crew fruitlessly whiling away several hours in the waiting room, the work day was ruined (since it turned out that almost all of the patients were wearing amulets). The "pick-eter," noticed purely by chance by one of the crew, did receive a reprimand from the Bäharden Party district committee, and the shoot successfully took place the following day, but this is still a representative story. And if that were not enough, in Ashgabat there emerged more deep thinkers, who strove to edit out the documentary's "sacral" scenes and even proposed to render them in the manner of a gest or caricature.

Demidov 1978: 160

As is too often the case in Soviet documentation about religion, this vignette denies us the kind of specific contextual information that would make detailed analysis possible. (What explanation was given to the patients turned away at the entrance? Why assume that amulets, rather than the presence of a television crew, had anything to do with the course of events?) Nevertheless, several features stand out, chief among them the setting: Demidov provides an extremely rare, and all too brief, snapshot of a rural Central Asian healthcare facility; we are reading about rural, and presumably impoverished, Muslims interacting with a Soviet institution of socialized health care. The locale lends particular significance to Demidov's chief observation, which is that all the patients wear talismans. He does not provide the original Turkmen word for the item he is describing, but it is safe to assume he is referring to *tumars*. Popular among Muslims and non-Muslims (including migrants from other parts of the former USSR) throughout Central Asia, these amulets, which come in many forms, offer the bearer general protection from the evil eye (Turkmen, *göz degme*), though sometimes they are intended to thwart or mitigate a specific spell. Amulets are also typically made by *khojas*, descendants of the Prophet. Often, their obtainment coincides with major life events: birth, marriage, going to the army, applying for university, etc. They can range from the ornately fashioned metal jewelry pieces that Turkmenistan is famous for (though these are usually reserved for ceremonial occasions) to more mundane items such as shells and the teeth of dead animals. Generally, they are attached to a necklace or pinned to an infant's clothing, though one can find them in many other guises (Borozna 1975; Schletzer and Schletzer 1983.).

With this context in mind, we can make the observation that is obvious to everyone but the author: that no one (other than the doctor, who belonged to the "intelligentsia" in Late Socialist parlance), saw any contradiction in appealing to the supernatural in a "scientific," and therefore Soviet, medical facility. If we regard the acquisition of an amulet not as a static manifestation

of Islamic religiosity, but as a process requiring planning, consultation, networking, and usually some money – all within the setting of a collective farm (since the locale in question is rural) – we can appreciate the dynamism on display in even as semantically impoverished a description of piety as Demidov's. The mothers turned away at the gate have already invested some effort into obtaining supernatural guarantees for their children's health, and view the "scientific" advice of a doctor (who, in addition to ordering x-rays, can also tell them what medicine to purchase) as an additional, and rational, way of trying to ensure the same outcome for their little ones. Demidov is inserting tension and contradiction into a picture where it is conspicuously absent: the doctor, for all we know, may simply have been trying to protect her patients' privacy.

Amulets were not yet a target of concerted antireligious activism, as they would briefly become during Gorbachev's anti-Islam campaign of 1986, when the Uzbek Party singled out "trinkets and objects with religious symbolism being distributed at state enterprises" (Tasar 2017: 317). The fact that they received such attention only on the cusp of communism's demise suggests just how such a spiritual "material culture" pervaded the Soviet workplace in Muslim settings, and surely non-Muslim ones as well.

Setting 3: A collective farm

The final space I would like to highlight is what one might term the Central Asian equivalent of one's own backyard (or courtyard). It concerns funerary monuments studied by two Uzbek ethnographers in Qaramurt, an Uzbek village in southern Kazakhstan's Shymkent province, in the 1960s. Although the literature on such monuments in Central Asia is extensive, the authors stumbled upon a particularly distinctive form known as *machkam* that could be erected either inside the house or outside (for a collection of innovative recent studies and references to Soviet-era ethnographic works pertaining to funerary practices and monuments, see Abashin and Bobrovnikov 2003). *Machkams* derive from the belief that, when deprived of a permanent resting place, the spirits of the dead, as well as *jinn*s, can cause illness (referred to as *arvoh kasalligi* in Uzbek, i.e., "spirit illness") to people in their communities, and especially children. People took the initiative to construct *machkams* only after repeated appearances by these ancestors in their dreams. If a villager thought his ancestors were trying to get his attention, he immediately consulted a supernatural practitioner (whom I will refer to as a shaman merely as a convenient shorthand), who took the lead in deciding next steps. The shaman determined whether the *machkam* should be built on the site of an existing one or be constructed anew, and, crucially, decided its exact location, which, more often than not, ended up being in or near the room where the deceased's corpse had been ritually washed before burial. Outdoor *machkams* were typically 120–150 cm high and 45–50 cm wide, while their indoor counterparts, often built in corners or attached to walls, were no more than 30 cm high and covered with a white tablecloth. All contained small tables on which candles were placed every Thursday night, in keeping with Central Asian tradition.

The *machkams*' intrinsic interest rests in the fact that, unlike most other funerary monuments, they afford a view inside people's homes and daily lives. Our ethnographers recount a story shared with them by a healer (*tavup*) named Mayim, concerning a certain RM born in 1922, which illustrates the ways in which the physical space of the house shaped important life decisions:

Her legs were paralyzed during childbirth. None of the treatments intended to help her had any effect. When she sought help from a fortune teller (*palchy*), they told her that the ailment was sent by the spirits, because their family *machkam* was not taken

care of. RM's father built a new *machkam* in the traditional manner in her room, and she recovered. ("After the *machkam* was built it was as if nothing had happened.") But after her father died the house was left empty since RM lived with her husband; with time the father's house began falling apart, and the *machkam* was left in the midst of ruin; the rites in honor of the spirit came to a halt. When the collective farmers were given land in the vicinity, RM's daughter received a plot next to her grandfather's old house and built a new one. But after moving there the young woman fell ill for a long time, and the doctors could do nothing. She went to Mayim-tavup, who was her relative. The shamaness told her that the abandoned *machkam* built by her grandfather was unhealthy and needed to be rebuilt from scratch. According to tradition, they sacrificed a lamb and RM's husband built a *machkam*. After this the young woman got better.

Taizhanov and Ismailov 1980: 88

This vignette offers a vivid example of the dual function domestic residential spaces could play when departed ancestors demanded a continuing role in the life of a family. The house RM was raised in before getting married exercises a powerful influence on the perceptions of well-being, propriety, and ethics exhibited by representatives of three generations of a family that represent the full sweep of Soviet history in one breath: the grandfather, RM herself, and RM's daughter. If we consider that the latter belongs roughly to the generation of Raleigh's "Soviet baby boomers" who were born in 1949/1950, we have the opportunity and challenge of trying to place the story in the context of some of the broad themes he outlines: relaxed work discipline, availability of consumer goods, and access to a media culture based in print, radio, and television (Raleigh 2012).

We can imaginatively speculate that the spirit housed in the *machkam* built by RM's son-in-law under Mayim-tavup's supervision had to listen to Late Socialist television broadcasts for much of the day, including, in the late 1980s, the ubiquitous séances of the hypnotist Anatoly Kashpirovsky. This could be dismissed as groundless rumination, yet Soviet institutions do not merely inhabit the story's backdrop: land redistribution policies undertaken by the collective farm leadership lead RM's daughter back to the ancestral hearth, and presumably into the orbit of her family's spirits (on widespread land redistribution initiatives in collective farms during the postwar decades, see Abashin 2015: 378). The story is inconceivable without the residential space of the collective farm, with its Soviet structures of hierarchy and social life, and its relaxed Late Socialist daily schedule.

Lest Late Socialism's connection to the *machkam* phenomenon appear far-fetched, consider the ethnographers' observations about their adaptability to novel material conditions. Distinguishing between makeshift "contemporary" (*sovremennyi*) *machkams* fashioned out of corrugated aluminum sheets, and what they somewhat satirically term "modernized" (*modernizirovannyi*) *machkams* that look more like well-maintained storage sheds, the authors seek to present evidence of religion's atrophy:

The process of decline in traditional religious observance also touches upon practices tied to the maintenance of homes for ancestors' spirits. The circle of people who consider this tradition necessary has sharply dropped. According to the *qishloq*'s longtime residents, one could find *machkams* in many homes at our century's outset. Now such homes for the ancestors' spirits are maintained by only a handful of families. At harvest time, the authors verified the existence of only nine *machkams* in Qaramurt, a large *qishloq* with around one thousand inhabitants. And these *machkams* exhibit

notable differences from the traditional structures. First, their external appearance has changed. They have a different look, use new construction materials, and employ novel finishing methods. Their roofs are made from slate and their walls from mud brick. Second, present-day *machkams* lack any meaningful ritual ornamentation. As a rule, they do not have a front platform for cups with food for the spirits and a flag. For example, a *machkam* built near the home of the 70 year old A. Satyldykanov comprises a domed structure (approximately 100 cm. high) made of mud brick. It has no doors or windows, only a stand for candles. Thus, even the physical appearance of the remaining *machkams* testifies to the fact that old beliefs have lost their meaning for the believers.

Taizhanov and Ismailov 1980: 93

What the authors take as evidence of the practice's decline in fact testifies to its adaptation within communist conditions. Their description suggests that the figure of nine *machkams* refers only to outdoor structures, not the domestic fixtures discussed for most of their article, which the authors presumably would have had no way of enumerating *in toto*. Two photographs they reproduce depict, first, a makeshift aluminum assemblage, and second, a substantial structure with a slanted metal roof and painted walls. Considering the village's isolation, these materials could only have been taken from the collective farm's storage depot. They are, moreover, out in the open, in what appears to be a densely populated area.

However, the most significant inference one can make from the ethnographers' observations is an apparent shift towards a utilitarian, and more public, model of construction. The use of high-quality materials, such as slate, and the lack of any means to provide food to the spirits inside the structure does not mean, as the ethnographers imply, that people care less. Rather, it testifies to the *machkams*' transformation into communal sites and visible reference points in the collective farm's landscape. This transformation can only be appreciated in light of the broader context of religious practice in Central Asia after World War II. Devin DeWeese has argued that the period from the eighteenth century onward witnessed a "diffusion of Sufi practices into broader social circles," a process that was "activated," rather than hindered, by the last two centuries' significant political and social ruptures. He presents a number of examples of rites associated with Sufism, including funeral practices and methods of communication with spirits, emerging in late Tsarist and Soviet sources in communal settings, thereby, in his framework, becoming "public." DeWeese demonstrates that their public nature allowed Soviet ethnographers to label these rites as "shamanic," and thus to paradoxically present adapted Sufi rituals as evidence of Islam's decline. He concludes that rather than being driven underground, Sufism "was, in effect, hiding in plain sight" (DeWeese 2014: 355).

This framework holds substantial explanatory power for unpacking the ethnographers' seemingly mundane account of construction methods in Qaramurt. The *machkams* built in the middle of collective farm residential complexes have become "public," i.e. Soviet, manifestations of piety. This has happened first, by virtue of the modifications to the "traditional" type they exhibit; and second, of the continuity they represent with the domestic cult of communication with the ancestors. This interpretation gains credence when we consider the builders' assumption that relatives and passers-by would content themselves with lighting candles once a week rather than offering food. After all, food offerings at an outdoor structure would make sense only in the more or less permanently staffed setting of a shrine which one might visit on special occasions. By contrast, the "modernized" *machkam* stands out precisely because it has been built with the assumption that people will pay it little attention. What the ethnographers

present as an example of neglect actually supports a more nuanced portrait of the “Sovietization” of a Central Asian Islamic rite, and the “Islamization” of the Qaramurt collective farm.

Conclusion

This contribution has pointed to some of the ways in which Soviet-era materials can be used to engage with personal and family piety in Central Asia, looking beyond “mere” practices. The fictional parent–child conversations about God presented at the outset, more than compensate for their semantic frugality by showcasing, upon closer scrutiny, a rich panorama of culturally, socially, and economically rooted assumptions embedded in the atheistic text, thus revealing how ideas about piety informed mundane interactions in Late Socialist Tajikistan. A dramatic film shoot from the early 1970s (or at least an attempt at one) illustrates how an exercise as quotidian and unremarkable as obtaining and wearing an amulet, allowed Muslim religiosity to permeate the corridors of all but the most ideologically rigid Soviet institutions. And the *machkam*’s adaptation to 1970s social and economic life reveals the limits of continuity and change as tools for understanding religious history, for in this case a genre of funeral monument remained an ongoing presence in the life of a collective farm, while deriving novelty and rejuvenation from the opportunities engendered by Late Socialist conditions.

If nothing else, these examples hint at the importance of treating piety as a ubiquitous feature of Late Socialist life in Central Asia, no less important or visible than the emerging consumer culture, changing attitudes towards marriage and sex, regular recourse to the black market, and cynicism about the Soviet system. Rather than querying whether people became more or less religious, the real question we should be asking is how Muslim piety informed being, and acting, Soviet. Communist frames have steered historians so resolutely in the direction of viewing Islam as something that ran counter, or at least parallel, to other parts of life in the USSR, that any kind of ontology of Soviet Islam has remained beyond reach. By moving beyond the futile exercise of locating Islam primarily in the public or private realms, historians can begin treating religion, broadly defined, as partly constitutive of the “normalcy” of Brezhnevian Central Asia. In addition to offering a more historically truthful picture of Soviet Islam, viewing piety as a constant but also changing and evolving part of life, can also help historians and anthropologists better understand Central Asian responses to new trends of the 1980s–1990s, from Wahhabism, to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, to New Age Spirituality, to Muslim prosperity gospels, and of course post-communist atheism (Louw 2020). Despite their seeming novelty, these movements can only be properly contextualized within the broader arc of religious change proposed by DeWeese. By overemphasizing the social significance of the twentieth century’s ruptures, and dismissing piety as a casualty of antireligious pressure, consumerism, education, professionalization, and nationalism, we miss the opportunity to engage with the “Muslimness” of Central Asian atheistic documentation and above all the Muslims who appear in it.

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TWO DEOBANDI VIEWS ON BEING MUSLIM IN INDIA

Indian bodies, Meccan hearts

Brannon D. Ingram

Introduction

The title of this chapter comes from a famous quote attributed to Hajji Imdad Allah al-Makki (1817–1899): “It is better for the body to be in India and the heart in Mecca, than for the body to be in Mecca and the heart in India” (al-Hasan n.d.: Vol. 2, 105). Imdad Allah was a Sufi master and spiritual mentor to a generation of early Deobandi scholars, the movement that is the focus of this chapter (Deobandi scholars are also explored by Noor and Khan in their respective contributions to this volume). Imdad Allah fled India after the Uprising of 1857, when narratives of Muslims’ alleged treachery against British rule were rampant. In language that we hear echoed today whenever Muslims’ citizenship and belonging are questioned, colonial officials held Muslims in deep suspicion and wondered openly whether Indian Muslims could ever truly be loyal to the Crown (see Morgenstein-Fuerst in this volume). This suspicion put Imdad Allah’s own life in danger. After a local chieftain in Imdad Allah’s hometown of Thana Bhavan was arrested and executed for allegedly smuggling elephants into Delhi to assist the rebels, the town’s residents asked Imdad Allah to act in the chieftain’s place as a local *amir*, or commander. Word of this got around to colonial officials, and Imdad knew he had to flee India to avoid a similar fate (Mirathi 1977: Vol. 1, 73–74).

At first glance, Imdad Allah’s statement, “It is better for the body to be in India and the heart in Mecca, than for the body to be in Mecca and the heart in India,” would seem to ratify the idea that Muslims have divided loyalties, that they happen to be Indian but their hearts are elsewhere (on the question of Muslim loyalty as minorities, see also Tontini in this volume). As always, the reality is more complicated. While in Mecca, Imdad Allah missed his friends and disciples dearly. His letters show us a man in exile, desperate for news of home. “I waited for your heart-felt letter for days. It finally arrived and filled me with joy,” he wrote in July 1895 to his star disciple, Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi, about whom more below (Imdad Allah n.d.: 22). Such yearning is typical of his correspondence. In this context, the statement is prescriptive: one’s heart *should* be in Mecca, but the truth is that Imdad Allah’s heart was often back home, in India. The statement is both an explanation for his longing and a balm for it: it is ok to feel a longing for home, but it is ultimately for the best that he is away.

At Imdad Allah’s Sufi lodge (*khanqah*) in Thana Bhavan, a disciple heard Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi mention this saying of Imdad Allah in a lecture. The disciple became distraught. He longed for

his wife and children. For him, the Sufi lodge was “Mecca,” and his home was “India.” His body was in Thana Bhavan, but his heart was back home. Thanvi consoled the disciple.

It is natural to you to have these thoughts and feelings. They are among the obligations you have to your family in the Shari’a. They are praiseworthy (*mahmud*). They become blameworthy (*mazmum*) if you leave your family and feel regret.

He goes on to explain, “When someone is fasting, he longs for food and drink. He waits until the fast is over. But he does not *regret* fasting” (al-Hasan n.d.: Vol. 2, 105). Hajji Imdad Allah spent the latter part of his life in exile in Mecca, and though he longed for home, he did not regret leaving.

This chapter proceeds under the assumption that Deobandis’ affective attachments to India are always more complex than any ostensible allegiance to the wider “Muslim world” might let on. Nevertheless, those attachments are ceaselessly interrogated still today, just as they were in 1857. In April 2016, the Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband seminary, where the Deoband movement began, made headlines for issuing a *fatwa* (a non-binding legal opinion) advising Muslims not to sing “Vande Mataram,” the national song of India (see Ali 2016 for a response from *The Hindu*). The seminary expressed concern with language in the song that suggests Mother India is to be worshipped. The song’s Sanskrit title literally means “I worship the mother,” or alternately, as an early English translation had it, “I bow to thee, Mother” (Ramaswamy 2010, 117–118). The *fatwa* began,

Vande Matram [*sic*] has some couplets containing beliefs against Islamic creed i.e. *shirk* (associating partner to Allah). The Indian land was depicted to be God and to be worshipped, this is against our creed of Tauheed (oneness of Allah). Therefore, Muslim children should avoid hymning it.

But the *fatwa* tempers this judgment with a reaffirmation of Indian Muslims’ long-standing place in the subcontinent and their loyalty to the nation. “We are ancient inhabitants of India, we love our country, but we do not worship it, Islam allows worshipping Allah alone, a Muslim worships none other than Allah.”¹

On the surface, this too would suggest a divided loyalty. How could a renowned institution like the Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband forbid Muslims from singing the national song of India if not because of some sort of aversion to India herself? And here, too, there is much more than meets the eye. Deobandis’ criticism of Vande Mataram was based on a deeply traditionalist view of Islamic theology and law, not any antipathy to the majority Hindu population, let alone the Indian nation as a whole. Since the founding of the Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband in 1866, Deobandis have urged Muslims to worship God and God alone. Something as seemingly innocuous as bowing before a Sufi saint’s shrine has been, for many of them, a threat to an individual Muslim’s standing in the afterlife. Even the subtle distinction that the *fatwa* made between “love” for India and “worship” of it mirrors theological-legal distinctions that Deobandis have long made. They believe that reverence (*ta’zim*) for a person or thing is permissible within certain parameters, but worship (*‘ibadat*) is reserved for God alone (Ingram 2018: 80–91).

Beyond the language they found theologically objectionable, though, the song has a dark history. “Vande Mataram” was first written in the early 1870s by the Bengali poet and novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The song’s first appearance was in Chatterjee’s novel *Anandamath*, which depicts a series of Bengali famines as a coordinated and deliberate effort by Muslims to starve Hindus. “Our faith is ruined, our caste and honour are gone, now even our lives are in

danger ... unless we drive out these drunken Muslim wretches,” cries one of the novel’s heroes. Another character, the ascetic Satyananda, pledges revenge. “We want to exterminate all the Muslims on this land as they are enemies of God” (Sarkar 2006: 3960). It is no surprise that the song had become a rallying cry for Hindu nationalists, chanted during anti-Muslim riots (Bhattacharya 2003: xiii–2). This painful history is the context in which we must understand the *fatwa*. The careful line that the Dar al-‘Ulum sought to tread – critiquing the worship of Mother India in one breath, affirming loyalty to India in the next – can be understood only in the context of the long history by which Muslims’ status in India has been repeatedly questioned. During the colonial era, British scholars and officials branded Muslims as “outsiders” in a subcontinent where they had lived since the eighth century (Asif 2016; Morgenstein Fuerst 2017). Hindu nationalists have long seen Muslims as “invaders,” or, even more sinisterly, as a cancer in the Indian body politic in need of extirpation. There is no doubt this rhetoric fueled the anti-Muslim pogroms that rocked New Delhi in early 2020 (Agrawal 2020; Kamdar 2020).

While this is the wider historical and political context for any study of Deobandis and their views on India, what proceeds below is not reducible to it. In this chapter, I offer two starkly different “Deobandi views” on India and being Muslim in India. With the caveat that there is no authoritative “Deobandi view” on any particular thing, this chapter takes the two most prominent Deobandi scholars of the twentieth century – Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957) and Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi (1863–1943) – to represent two very different, yet complementary ways that Deobandis conceptualized India. To call their views “Deobandi,” as the title of this essay suggests, is already to reify and oversimplify what it means to be a Deobandi scholar. The Deoband movement has existed for over 150 years, and now stretches across the globe. Since the founding of the Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband seminary, those who have identified as “Deobandis” have held a wide array of views on every conceivable subject. Nevertheless, there are some general features of the Deoband movement that most Deobandis will uphold to varying degrees. The Deoband movement has been characterized by its effort to produce scholarship in the classical Islamic theological and legal disciplines (following the Hanafi school, in particular), and to disseminate teachings based on that scholarship to a wider Muslim public. Deobandis have typically been Sufis but have been ambivalent about particular Sufi practices. (For the Deobandis, initiation into one or more of the four major Sufi orders in South Asia – Chishti, Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Suhrawardi – has been *de rigueur*, with the first two being the most prevalent.) Deobandis have founded seminaries (*madrasas*) around the world to advance these ideas and to train traditionally educated scholars (*‘ulama*) to function as imams and religious advisers in their local communities. The movement gained notoriety in the twenty-first century because of the fact that Taliban leadership emerged from a prominent Deobandi institution in Northwest Pakistan (Ingram 2020). This has overshadowed the fact that many Deobandi scholars supported India’s independence from Britain and fiercely opposed Partition and the movement for Pakistan. Regardless, we must attempt to understand Deobandis’ place in the subcontinent beyond the traumas of Partition and the fraught relationship between the modern states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Given the necessarily short length of this chapter, I am only able to provide the reader with a cursory sketch of Madani, Thanvi, and their legacies, but let me briefly outline the contrasts I will draw below. Of the two, Madani spilled more ink on India itself. He conscientiously celebrated Indian nationhood and Muslims’ unique contributions to Indian history. As we will see, Madani’s engagement with the very idea of “India” was primarily in the political sphere; he campaigned against the British, fought Partition, and called relentlessly for Hindu–Muslim unity. Thanvi, for his part, was studiously aloof from politics for most of his life, and rarely engaged with the idea of “India” at all. His engagement with the subcontinent came through

seeing it as a fount of Islamic piety, devotion, and learning, but also as a place in need of urgent reform, especially in the context of Sufi devotions. He saw India's Muslims, then, as a population in need of salvation—securing knowledge from the *'ulama*. The lines I draw here between these two “views” are not watertight by any means. Both Thanvi and Madani were pious Sufis, deeply reverent towards the great Sufis of the subcontinent. Both were anxious to educate Muslims in the “proper” way to revere them and visit their shrines. But on political matters, they famously differed markedly. These political differences color their respective understandings of their homeland.

Situating “India”

To discuss how Deobandis have understood and conceptualized India, we need to clarify what we mean by “India.” Deobandi texts in vernacular languages (principally Urdu) do not typically refer to India at all; they refer to “Hindustan.” As Manan Asif has recently argued, we must be careful not to conflate the two (Asif 2020). Pre-Partition, of course, India was larger than it is now, encompassing all of what is present-day India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. “Hindustan” was never as precise in its geographical extent as the modern nation-state of India, but broadly referred to the Indo-Gangetic plain of what is now north central India, along with Sind, Punjab, and Bengal. From the late Mughal era to the end of the colonial period, the meaning of “Hindustan” underwent a series of semantic reconfigurations. As Manu Goswami argued, “During the second half of the nineteenth century, the term Hindustan lost its particularized reference to the Indo-Gangetic plain and came to figure the area encompassed by the colonial state.” Whereas Hindustan had previously connoted the Mughal imperium, in the colonial era it came to accrue a “modern territory-oriented conception of sovereignty” that was a “break from Mughal administrative and cartographic traditions” (Goswami 2004: 194–195). This emergent geographic imaginary was accelerated by technological changes such as the Indian railway in the 1850s, which connected hitherto disparate parts of the subcontinent. After the 1857 Uprising against British rule, the British expanded the railway network dramatically as part of their effort in securing the subcontinent militarily and controlling it economically (Aguilar 2011).

“It is remarkably clear that in the post-1857 world, Hindustan, as a political space, was barely visible,” states Asif. At the same time, new visions of the *umma* seized the imaginations of India's Muslims. Asif thus argues that while figures such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan “referred to the inhabitants of the subcontinent as Hindustani, they were in conversation with, or working on, projects that were pan-Asian or pan-Islamic. Their textual worlds are almost explicitly confined to the hyperlocal (Delhi, Aligarh, Lucknow) and the global (London, Cairo, Istanbul, Beirut)” (Asif 2020: 213). This is the “Muslim world” in the making, configured through new steamship routes connecting the Indian Ocean, and increasingly defined by the West as a totalizing religio-racial identity (Alavi 2015; Aydin 2017).

As “India” came increasingly into the foreground, then, “Hindustan” began to recede from view, at least as a political category. But Hindustan persisted in other ways, of course. The language that students now study as the awkwardly hyphenated “Hindi-Urdu” was, well into the twentieth century, known as Hindustani, though by mid-century, that appellation was increasingly rare.² By the mid-twentieth century, of course, “India” as a political/geographical concept had come into full view. Hindustan had been reduced (merely) to the Urdu word for India. “In effect,” concludes Asif, “the making of ‘India’ and the unmaking of ‘Hindustan’ are twinned processes” (Asif 2020: 32–33). For our purposes here, then, even as Hindustan as a political concept continued to recede, “Hindustan” as the Urdu word for “India” was increasingly accepted as an uncontroversial linguistic fact. Thus, the title of Husain Ahmad Madani's text that I discuss

below, *Hamara Hindustan aur us ke Faza'il*, written in 1941, is commonly translated as *Our India and Its Virtues*. Throughout this chapter, I translate “Hindustan” as “India,” even with the recognition that the semantic overlap is not seamless.

The campaigner: Husain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957)

It is no coincidence that the very first English-language monograph on the Deobandis was devoted to the support that prominent Deobandi *‘ulama* gave to the struggle for India’s independence (Faruqi 1963). Long before the Deobandis were associated with the Taliban, they were associated with Indian nationalism and anticolonial activism. A generation of Deobandis fought and mobilized alongside their Hindu compatriots to oust the British. Many of them also opposed the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims. Foremost among them was Husain Ahmad Madani. Much has been written about Madani, and I will only summarize his life and career briefly here. Madani was born in 1877 in the north Indian town of Tanda into a family of former *zamindars* (landowners) whose fortunes had declined after the 1857 Uprising. He studied at Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband, leaving in 1898 to go on *hajj*. In Mecca, he met Imdad Allah and became his Sufi disciple. Back in India in 1901, he became the disciple of another famous Deobandi scholar, Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (1828–1905). He eventually became the principal of the Dar al-‘Ulum Deoband, a position he held for the last three decades of his life (Metcalf 2009: 51–71).

But it is Madani’s work in anticolonial activism and politics that concerns us here. That is the space through which we can best glimpse how Madani understood Islam’s place in India itself. Throughout the 1920s, Madani campaigned, first, on behalf of the Khilafat Movement, the ultimately abortive effort to preserve the Ottoman Empire from disintegration; subsequently, he expressed support for Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement. He called for Hindu–Muslim unity against the British, even as he was deeply wary of an incipient Hindu nationalism. That being said, Madani was mostly unperturbed by songs like “Vande Mataram” and other Hindu-inflected nationalist imagery, content to interpret the language of the song metaphorically (Metcalf 2009: 6). He was just as wary of Muslim nationalism, especially the direction the Muslim League took in the 1930s, with Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948) at the helm. His deepest desire, one that would never be fulfilled, was to prevent the partition of India, for which he proposed an idea dubbed “composite nationalism” (*muttahida qawmiyyat*), a form of national unity that did not fall along religious lines. Madani believed religiously defined nationalism played into the hands of the British. It also squelched forms of solidarity between and among Muslims across borders. The aim of Islam’s enemies, he concluded, using terms borrowed from English, was to crush the “spirit” (*ispirit*) of “pan-Islamism” (*pan Islamizm*) by stoking “racial, national, and linguistic distinctions” between Muslims (Madani 2006: 134).

But to fight the forces of Hindutva, too, Madani knew that he had to secure the place of Islam in the subcontinent. Arguably no text is a better window into Madani’s vision of India than his *Hamara Hindustan aur us ke Faza'il* (*Our India and Its Virtues*), written in 1941. *Hamara Hindustan* is an odd book, in the sense that Madani is essentially trying to one-up the Hindu nationalists by imagining a Muslim claim to India that is more primordial than theirs. It is a counterintuitive notion, to be sure, but also an original one. This striking argument is laid out from the very first line of the book: “Among the peoples of India, only Muslims can claim to be this land’s original inhabitants,” because, he says, in India only the Muslims believe themselves to be descendants of Adam, the earth’s first being, whereas other communities do not. Adam, Madani goes on to explain, first alighted upon the Earth in India (Madani 1946: 3). Adam’s descendants – the first Muslims – fanned out across India, where they tilled the land and settled

down into cities and civilizations. On this account, the first Muslims hailed from India, not Arabia. “The gist is that India has been the cradle of the Islamic religion since ancient times. Therefore it is most certainly the case that, from the beginning, this land (*mulk*) has been the homeland (*watan*) of Islam” (Madani 1946: 4–5).

But the claim he made was material as well. The very soil of India had been sacralized by the bodies of the Muslims buried in it. “By virtue of their bodily repose (*sukunat jismani*), too,” he asserted, “India is a homeland (*watan*) of the Muslims.” Unlike Hindus and Zoroastrians, who destroy their dead, Muslims inter their dead in the ground, and have done so for millennia. This is why the subcontinent is dotted with tombs of Muslim saints (Madani 1946: 5–6). India is also a homeland by virtue of Muslims’ “spiritual connections” (*ta'alluqat-i ruhani*) to the land. The other major religions of India, Madani explains, believe in the transmigration of souls, in which case the soul may not even be reconstituted in the subcontinent. Muslims believe that souls remain tethered to the physical space of the grave until the Day of Judgment. Thus, even after death, Muslims maintain a connection with the land, through their bodies and through their souls.

Madani cites very few sources in this text. One that he does cite repeatedly is *Subhat al-marjan fi athar Hindustan* (*The Coral Rosary of Indian Antiquities*) by the famed Indian Muslim poet and litterateur Ghulam Azad Bilgrami (d. 1786). Written in 1763–1764, *Subhat al-Marjan* is Madani’s primary source for his bold claims about India’s central place in Islamic cosmology and history. Drawing on Hadith traditions as well as travelers’ narratives, Bilgrami argued that Adam’s Peak, a mountain in what is now Sri Lanka, is the spot where the prophet Adam, the first human being, alighted upon the Earth, making it the second holiest site in Islam after Mecca. Because Adam was a prophet, India was by extension the first site of divine revelation, the site of the first mosque, and the place from which the first pilgrimage to Mecca was performed. The black stone of the Ka’aba, too, came from India, as did the staff that Moses turned into a serpent before Pharaoh (Ernst 2016: 26–27). For all intents and purposes, Adam, the first Muslim, was an Indian. Bilgrami concludes the first section of his book:

It is no secret that the children of Adam are all Indians because their father Adam (peace be upon him) was an Indian; he dwelled to the end of his life in India and brought his children there. After they reached maturity, they spread from India through the seven climes.

Ernst 2016: 34

If this all sounds, at first glance, rather far-fetched, Bilgrami relies on unassailable authorities, including Rumi, al-Suyuti, and the Prophet himself (for an extensive discussion of classical Islamic sources on Adam’s relation to Sri Lanka, known as Sarandib, see Ricci 2019: 125–148; the topic is also addressed by Tschacher and Xavier in their respective contributions to this volume). What Bilgrami achieves is a complete reorientation of Islamic cosmology around India. It is unsurprising, then, that Husain Ahmad Madani would be attracted to such a text. As Metcalf has noted, it gave him the rhetorical ammunition he needed to express his love for India and rebut the primordialist claims of Hindutva at the same time. Madani’s text is best seen as a retort to the autochthonous claims of the Hindutva movement that envisioned India as aboriginally and exclusively “Hindu” (Metcalf 2005: 394).

The reformer: Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi (1863–1943)

If Husain Ahmad Madani devoted his life to campaigning, Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi devoted his to writing. Thanvi was born in 1863 in Thana Bhavan. He completed his studies at Deoband in

1883, after which he went on his first *hajj*. In Mecca, he became the Sufi disciple of Imdad Allah. Upon returning to India, Thanvi took up a teaching post at a *madrasa* in Kanpur. But with Imdad Allah's support, he left that position in 1897 and returned to Thana Bhavan, where he took up permanent residence at Imdad Allah's Sufi lodge, Khanqah Imdadiyya. Though he would periodically leave to give lectures at mosques and *madrasas* around India, Thanvi spent the vast majority of the rest of his life in Thana Bhavan, writing prolifically on the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic law, theology, and Sufism (Zaman 2008: 13–25). In total, he authored scores of books, ranging from small pamphlets to multi-volume commentaries, all focused on a singular, dominant goal: reviving the faith of India's Muslims. Among those texts was *Bihishti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), written for women to acquire literacy, basic life skills, and a rudimentary religious education. It became one of the most widely printed books in South Asian history (Thanvi and Metcalf 1990). His translation of the Qur'an, *Bayan al-Qur'an*, was also immensely popular. Thanvi rendered the Qur'an in non-idiomatic Urdu for the express purpose of making it accessible to Muslims throughout India, not just in specific cities or regions (Tareen 2020: 247).

His Qur'an translation, in fact, was noted as a signal contribution to South Asian Islam when he died. "There is no Muslim home in India that does not have Mawlana Thanvi's translation of the Qur'an," read one (doubtlessly exaggerated) obituary in an Urdu-language newspaper. "By translating the Holy Qur'an into Urdu and writing a commentary like *Bayan al-Qur'an*, elucidating the subtleties of the Qur'an for Indians who are completely ignorant of the Arabic language," it concludes, Thanvi "rendered an immense service to the Muslims of India" (al-Hasan n.d.: Vol. 4, 83). Thanvi's supporters accordingly saw him as the "renewer" (*mujaddid*) of the thirteenth Muslim century, one in a line of Indian renewers. In fact, a consensus formed in north Indian scholarly circles that all the renewers of the second Islamic millennium came from India (al-Hasan n.d.: Vol. 3, 263–4). Thanvi thus inspired quite a bit of India-centric pride on the part of his disciples and followers. Staying in Mecca during his first *hajj*, the young Thanvi had received the blessing of Hajji Imdad Allah to represent Imdad Allah as his deputy (*khaliifa*) and, most importantly, to return to India to revive the religion. Like many texts in the genre, Thanvi's biography relates a series of dreams and good portents by those back home. In one of them, a fellow disciple of Imdad Allah related his dream:

I saw Hazrat Wala [Thanvi] returning from Noble Mecca. As soon as he got off of the ship, suddenly a light spread across all of India [*Hindustan*], and the darkness that I felt in the dream up to that point was banished.

al-Hasan n.d.: Vol. 1, 213

This is a clue to how we can best approach Thanvi's conceptualization of "India." Thanvi, to be sure, did not author any texts as explicitly devoted to the very idea of India as Madani did. But Thanvi saw India primarily through the lens of its great Sufi saints and its great Muslim scholars. Thanvi's role as a Sufi/scholar is key here. Contrary to the (very modern) presumptions about tension between Sufism and Islamic law – tensions that have deep roots in Orientalism (Ernst 2011; Green 2012a) – Thanvi did not separate Sufism from other dimensions of Islamic piety. For him, as for all Deobandis, Sufism and Shari'a were mutually constitutive. They are the inner (*batin*) and outer (*zahir*) manifestations of the same comprehensive faith (*din*). It is for this reason that his efforts to educate Indian Muslims on the basics of Islamic belief and practice, and his conviction that Sufism is the best way to achieve that, go hand in hand. Thanvi therefore saw the subcontinent as a space defined by the incessant pull between two opposing forces: the

forces of religious revitalization, and the forces that hindered it. Sufism, paradoxically, was both an engine of revitalization and, in its popular forms, an obstacle to it.

Let us look briefly at some of the Sufi practices that were most prevalent in India and which Thanvi found to be especially risky. Arguably the most important Sufi lineage in the subcontinent is the Chishtiyya. The Chishti order has been a central part of Indian Muslim identity since the thirteenth century (Ernst and Lawrence 2002). One way to gauge this is to look at the relationship between Chishti masters and the state. For the Delhi Sultans, the Chishtis were a source of imperial legitimacy, even if the Chishtis kept the sultans at arm's length (Anjum 2011). This relationship continued in the Mughal era. Akbar (d. 1605) was a massive patron of Sufi shrines, the shrine of Mu'in al-Din Chishti in Ajmer in particular. Akbar visited Ajmer some 14 times and donated the large cauldron used to make food for pilgrims (Currie 1989: 99–100). But Chishti saints and their shrines had become flashpoints in the minds of late-colonial Deobandis like Thanvi. Thanvi, like other Deobandis, was especially concerned about practices surrounding the visit of Sufi saints' shrines, concerns not unlike those we saw with *Vande Mataram*.

Thanvi, to be sure, did not put forward a blanket condemnation of visiting saints' shrines. On the contrary, he encouraged it. Visiting saint's shrines was a way to honor them and to experience the spiritual energy (*faiz*) that surrounds the tomb. Like other Deobandis, he also considered gravesites in general to be places for reflection on one's own mortality and divine judgment. Visiting shrines becomes problematic when the intentionality behind the visit or activities done at the shrine contravene the Shari'a. To explain, one must not visit a shrine expecting miracles or favors, but here, too, there is nuance. Miracles (*karamat*) do happen, but problems arise when people misunderstand the agency by which they take place. All miracles transpire through the sole volition of God. In fact, God may temporarily confer that volition upon the saint, but one must never assume that the saint possesses those powers *inherently*; that is *shirk*, according divine qualities or powers to an entity other than God. As Thanvi's disciple Muhammad Shafi' (d. 1976) memorably explained, these powers are temporarily granted to a saint or prophet in the same way an electric current temporarily runs through a fan. No one assumes the fan can run independently of its source of electricity, and one should think of saints in the same way (Shafi' 1969: Vol. 1, 40–44). This may seem like splitting hairs, but it has a direct impact on whether someone commits *shirk*, one of the gravest sins in Islam.

Similarly, Thanvi and his students sought to teach visitors what they can and cannot do at shrines. Actions like circumambulating the shrine or prostrating in front of it were also sources of potential *shirk*. The reasons for this are clear: such actions are specified in the Qur'an and *sunna* as acts of worship. Circumambulation (*tawaf*) is required for the Ka'aba and the Ka'aba alone. Prostration (*sujud*) is specified for the salat prayer and only for the Salat. Thanvi devoted enormous attention to these critiques in works such as *Hifz al-Iman (The Preservation of Faith, 1901)* and *Bihishti Zewar (Heavenly Ornaments, 1905)*. The latter includes a litany of acts that he took it upon himself to correct: "holding fairs at graves ... lighting lamps at graves ... putting sheets over graves ... kissing or licking graves, rubbing the dirt of graves, circumambulating or bowing in front of graves," and so on (Thanvi 2001: 61).

Thanvi's anxieties about shrine-based devotions dovetailed with a separate legal-theological discourse, "imitating the unbeliever" (*tashabbuh bi-l kuffar*), that tells us more about how he and other Deobandis perceived being Muslim in a religiously diverse landscape. Thanvi's reading of Hanafi law led him to conclude that the Shari'a mandates "distinguishing the Muslim community (*qawm*) and maintaining differences in our clothing, our manners, our way of speaking, and our behavior" (Thanvi 2005: 186–187). Certain practices are forbidden (*haram*) on account of their being tied specifically to non-Muslim religious practice. So, he says, a Muslim must

not wear a cross around the neck in imitation of Christians, or leave a lock of hair (known as a *choti*) at the back of the head in imitation of Hindus (Thanvi 2003: 151). These are not arbitrary decisions. All of Thanvi's perspectives derive from his engagement with the hermeneutic principles of Islamic law. The basic idea that animated his thinking is that the *din* is unitary and all-encompassing, and must be protected.

But ironically, and in sharp contrast to Madani, Thanvi believed it was the *British* presence in India that secured the ability for Muslims to maintain these distinctions. They allowed Muslims to go about their business free of interference (in theory if not always in practice). This was intimately tied to a colonial idea of religion as a space of private conscience, something done in the home and the mosque (Chatterjee 2011). For this reason, unlike Madani, Thanvi felt no urgent need to overthrow British rule. He was no Anglophile, to be sure. In accordance with the principles articulated above, Thanvi urged Muslims to shun the English language, English styles of dress, and jobs in colonial administration (Ingram 2015). But as far as anticolonial activism was concerned, he counseled Muslims not to rock the boat. At minimum, he said, the British permitted Muslims to worship freely, without restraint or interference; for Thanvi, this was ultimately the most important matter, given that this life is a mere preparation for the next.

This perspective even compelled him to issue some overly rosy declarations as to the nature of Christianity itself. "Since time immemorial, the practice of the Christian people has been not to quarrel with or oppose any other sect or creed (*millat aur mazhab*), nor do they meddle in the religious freedom (*mazhabi azadi*) of others," Thanvi wrote in June 1930. "Therefore, it is acceptable for Muslims to live here in India (*hindustan*) under the rule of the Christians who are in control." He went on to note that the Prophet had sent Muslims to Christian-ruled Abyssinia, knowing that they would not be persecuted (al-Hasan n.d., Vol. 3: 206). This was, at once, a Shari'a-informed religious stance and a strategic political calculation. For Thanvi, the risk of what Madani was proposing seemed too high: fighting immensely powerful colonizers, who had already demonstrated no mercy for those who rose up against them, and doing so alongside a restive Hindu majority that would, in his mind, perceive any ostensible Hindu-Muslim alliance as short-lived. In other words, Muslims would trade the security of an occupying force who granted them "religious freedom" for the uncertainty of a majority that may not.

This cautiously apolitical stance complements Thanvi's view of India primarily as a space in need of reform. Thanvi's legacy is seen today most palpably in the Tablighi Jama'at, now the world's largest movement for Muslim revitalization (see Noor in this volume). Much has been written on the Tablighis, which I will not attempt to summarize here, but in short, the movement was founded by Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlavi (1865–1944), a graduate of the Dar al-'Ulum Deoband who envisioned the Tablighi Jama'at as a direct extension of the Deobandi reformist project into spaces outside the confines of the *madrassa*. Ilyas developed a program that, in theory, any Muslim could follow, regardless of whether he or she had any *madrassa* training. The methodology of the program centered on the preaching mission (*gasht*, literally "going round"), which participants are called to do with a party (*jama'at*) one night a week, three nights a month, 40 days a year, and for 120 days once in a lifetime.

The reason the Tablighis are relevant here is the extent to which it illustrates the very particular mode of imagining India that we see emanating from Thanvi. That is, in this view, "India" is more or less one node in a global nexus of reform, in which spaces are mostly shorn of their local identifying features. Barbara Metcalf has argued that the Tablighi Jama'at has a "typological" view of space and a "non-linear" view of time. Spaces are significant primarily to the extent that they are sites of morally exemplary acts. Configuring space almost entirely

through “patterns of moral significance” enables Tablighis to reconfigure the classic center/periphery dichotomies of Islam. “Far from being on the periphery,” argues Metcalf, “they can make any place a center” (Metcalf 1996: 119). We see this typological view of time and space in the narrative of Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhlavi’s visit to South Africa in 1981, where Kandhlavi performed *i’tikaf* (the practice of staying in a mosque for ten days during Ramadan) at a mosque in Stanger, south of Durban. The narrative recounts nearly every moment of the trip – salat prayers, supererogatory prayers (*tarawih*), visits by local Muslims, and so on. Outside that mosque in Stanger, South Africa was experiencing political violence and social unrest on a massive scale, but the text does not provide even a hint of that wider context. It could have been a mosque anywhere in the world (Shahid 1982). Commenting on this text, Nile Green writes that it

contained almost no details of the journey’s African locations and instead provided a narrative of praying, blessings, signs of respect, deferential meetings, and moral discussions ... Even specific places were presented not as cities but as social networks: Durban, for example, featured in the text solely as a circle of mosques and pious Muslims. In this travelogue, at least, Africa was not so much meaningful in itself but as a crucible of Deobandi piety.

Green 2012b: 190–191

In my own book, I have traced how this Tablighi view of space dovetailed with a studiously apolitical stance towards the political goals of the anti-apartheid movement and Muslims’ involvement in it (Ingram 2018). The impact of Thanvi’s legacy is felt, in this way and in many others, on the global Deoband movement.

Beyond essentialism, beyond syncretism

The present volume and the wider study of Islam in Asia have correctly focused on the critique of the center/periphery binaries that have animated much of the civilizational discourse surrounding the study of “the Muslim world.” The center/periphery binary has long overlapped with another binary, that of the “Islamic” and the “un-Islamic.” In conjunction with one another, these dual binaries posit a reified thing called “Islam” that originated in seventh-century Arabia and subsequently moved and migrated across regions and oceans, interacting with other traditions, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony. This mode of thinking remains powerful certainly outside of the academy, and in more subtle ways, within it (Tschacher’s and Tontini’s contributions in this volume directly engage this issue).

Until fairly recently, it was still common to see references to “syncretic” traditions that “blended” features of Islam with features of non-Muslim traditions. In a short article that remains strikingly relevant, despite being now almost two decades old, Carl Ernst and Tony Stewart critiqued the category of “syncretism” as an analytical framework, arguing

[s]yncretism as both process and description hinges on the assumption that those observed have inappropriately mixed cultural and religious categories that are intrinsically alien to each other. With several notable exceptions – the Mughal emperor Akbar, Dara Shikuh, Kabir, the Sikhs – scholars have tended to locate examples of syncretistic religion and ritual at the non-textual village or local level, and especially in areas that are deemed remote from the centers of traditional society.

Ernst and Stewart 2003: 586

In this way, regions on the “periphery” of Islamicate civilization and non-textual traditions are more likely to be syncretic. But, as Ernst and Stewart astutely conclude, “On examination, every ‘pure’ tradition turns out to contain mixed elements; if everything is syncretistic, nothing is syncretistic” (Ernst and Stewart 2003: 586). Ernst’s own work on Muslim studies of Indian religions in the premodern period has been a testament to the scholarly value of tracking the intermingling of traditions without invoking these binaries (Ernst 2016). The turns towards objects and materiality in the study of Islam are efforts to extend this line of inquiry beyond texts (Bigelow 2021; Flood 2009).

And yet, as much as academics – rightly – deconstruct and interrogate all forms of essentialism, especially the essentialisms that undergird and authorize violence, we must remain attune to the ways historical actors deploy essentialisms themselves. In this chapter, we saw how Husain Ahmad Madani countered Hindutva’s claim that India is primordially Hindu with the claim that India is, in fact, primordially *Muslim*. From Madani’s perspective, the claim is theologically sound; after all, Adam *was* a Muslim, and if Adam’s Peak really was the place where the first man alighted upon the earth, it follows that the first Muslim was an “Indian” in some loose sense of the term. What makes Madani’s essentialist claim stand out is the way in which it contrasts with the essentialisms of Deobandis like Ashraf ‘Ali Thanvi. Thanvi’s quest to purify Indian Islam from “Hindu” influences and his view of India itself primarily as a venue for revitalization and proselytization are harder to defend with a scholarly language that has a built-in aversion to discourses of purity. One possible corrective for this is to heed Ernst and Stewart’s call to deconstruct purist claims. And to be sure, lurking beneath even Deobandis’ claims of purity, there are some striking forms of texture and nuance. To take just one example, Deobandis have defended the use of the yogic technique of holding the breath (*habs-i dam*) in Sufi meditation by claiming that even though it *resembles* a “Hindu” yogic practice, Sufis acquired the technique independently of their (well-documented) dalliance with Hindu practices (Ingram 2018: 103). Even if the Deobandis explain away this sort of “borrowing” from Hinduism by questioning its origins, it is a telling example of the fact that such borrowings exist in even the most purity-minded of places (the issue of borrowing, convergence, and adaptation is also discussed by Xavier and Arjana, this volume, in the context of Sri Lanka’s and Southeast Asia’s shrines, respectively).

But another approach would be to resist deconstructing purist claims altogether, and instead, defend even the purity-minded as resolutely as we defend the traditions that embrace ambiguity, exchange, and contradiction. Shahab Ahmed was certainly correct that Islam, like any world-historical phenomenon thirteen centuries in the making, has a stunning capacity for internal contradiction, and scholars must resist the urge to hammer out those contradictions in pursuit of grand narratives (Ahmed 2016). But if we defend Muslims in India *today* by invoking all the rich and textured ways that they have participated in, appreciated, and appropriated Indian culture, history, literature, language, and civilization, we may inadvertently expose those Muslims who do *not* do all those things, at least not in readily obvious ways, to new lines of attack. Put differently, even *if* a Deobandi’s “heart” is in Mecca, it is a scholarly imperative to defend their ability to live in India today in a way that is free of anti-Muslim hostility. Scholars need to develop an ethical vocabulary for defending not just the erstwhile “syncretists” from Islamophobic attacks, but the “purists” too.

Notes

- 1 <https://darulifta-deoband.com/home/en/islamic-beliefs/11573>. Last accessed November 24, 2020. (Emphasis added.)

- 2 By the time the United States War Department published *Hindustani: A Guide to the Spoken Language* in 1944, use of the phrase “Hindustani language” was becoming the exception rather than the rule. It is worth noting that Hindustani was how Hindi–Urdu was referred to in *English*; in Urdu, Urdu was called Urdu. There are still other uses of the term, however; even today, “Hindustani” remains as a genre of music.

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THE TABLIGHI JAMA'AT MOVEMENT IN MARITIME SOUTHEAST ASIA

Piety in motion

Farish A. Noor

The origins and development of the Tablighi Jama'at: A pan-Asian lay missionary movement in perpetual motion

In the broad constellation of *da'wa* (missionary) movements found across the Muslim world today, the Tablighi Jama'at is somewhat unique in the sense that it is one of the few Muslim lay missionary movements that originated in Asia and whose development was shaped and tempered by the socio-cultural-political realities of Asia from the outset. Its origins can be traced to Mewat, North India, and the Deobandi tradition that emerged from the renowned Dar'ul Uloom madrasah of Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, that was founded by Maulana Muhammad Qassim Nanotawi and Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi in 1867 (Deobandis are also at the center of Ingram's contribution to this volume). Founded a decade after the so-called "Indian revolt" of 1857 and at a time when Muslim political power in British India had reached its nadir, the Deobandi school of thought focused on the revival and preservation of Islamic culture and learning as part of its struggle to maintain a sense of Muslim identity in India (on the impact of 1857 on India's Muslims, see Morgenstein Fuerst in this volume). In the late 1920s (around 1926–1927) Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (1885–1944) founded the Tabligh movement in response to what he regarded as the dilution of Muslim identity in the Indian sub-continent. The Tabligh's conservative stand on Islamic orthodoxy can be accounted for when we consider the historical context against which it emerged as a movement that was dedicated to saving Indian Muslims from the missionary efforts of both Christian missionaries from the West and Hindu revivalists in India (for more on the subject of growing Indian Muslim–Hindu rivalry during the period, see Sikand 1997; 2004). With his close ties to Deoband and its sister school the Mazahiru'l-Ulum of Saharanpur, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas endeavored to restore Muslim piety to its place, with a strong emphasis on personal morals and ethics; and his work would later be continued by his successors Maulana Yusuf Kandhalawi (1917–1965) and Maulana Muhammad Zakaria Kandhalawi (1898–1982).

A central idea that is found in the foundational discourse of the Tablighi Jama'at is the notion that one is never simply a Muslim because one was born so. It was Maulana Muhammad Ilyas who coined the slogan "Oh Muslims! Become Muslims," that was meant to serve as the

movement's clarion call, and also a reminder to all Muslims that their religiosity had to be grounded in conscious praxis and piety. Herein lies one of the special features of the Tablighi Jama'at: unlike so many other missionary movements that exist in the world today, the Tablighi has always regarded the Muslim community as its primary target audience opting to convert other fellow Muslims with the hope that they will become more consciously pious in their lives – rather than trying to convert those from other faith communities.

It was this internal focus within the Muslim community itself that rendered the Tabligh relatively invisible, as the movement opted for a form of missionary activity that elsewhere I have described as a form of “low-level, low-risk activism” (Noor 2012: 21–22). In the course of their missionary work the Tablighis have always maintained that piety is a reachable goal, and that the Muslims of today's world need only look back to the ideal Prophetic type that was embodied by the Prophet Muhammad himself as a model of a truly Islamic way of life (Noor 2012: 19, 21).

It was from India that the Tablighi Jama'at – along with other Muslim movements and organizations such as the Deobandis, Ahmadis, Barelvis, and the *Ahl-e Hadith* – would later spread across South and Southeast Asia (Reetz 2006). Following in the footsteps of countless other South Asian Muslims who had crossed the Indian Ocean and made their way east to Southeast Asia, the Tablighis first began to venture to Indonesia, Thailand, and the Malaysia Peninsula in the 1950s (Noor 2012: 33–57). They arrived at a time when Southeast Asia was itself going through a somewhat tumultuous period, as Malaya was struggling to secure its independence (as the Federation of Malaya in 1957 and later Malaysia in 1963) and Indonesia was under the rule of President Sukarno who was trying to keep his loose governmental coalition of Nationalists, Islamists, and Communists (the so-called NASAKOM coalition) in line.

Owing to the fact that almost all of the early Tablighis who came to Southeast Asia in the 1950s were of Indian origin, they faced difficulties as a result of their lack of familiarity with the languages, culture, and politics of the countries they were visiting for the first time. When the first Tabligh delegation arrived in Java (in 1955) for instance they could only seek succor in the homes of other South Asians who were already living in Indonesia as Indonesian citizens (Noor 2012: 35). The same was the case for the Tablighis who arrived in Singapore and Penang later (Noor 2012: 44, 45, 50, 51). As they travelled across the Indonesian archipelago, some of the Tablighis were met with scorn, derision, or even repression (in the East Javanese town of Kudus the first Tablighis were in fact arrested and later sent to Jakarta for detention and questioning; see Noor 2012: 43–44), and in many of the countries of the region the local Muslims could not comprehend why a group of Indian Muslims would wish to take residence in their local mosques (Noor 2012: 37, 43). During these early years, the Tablighis were often compelled to locate themselves in mosques that were in far-flung areas, or in localities that were deemed unsavory, such as the Masjid Jami' Kampung Jeruk in the Glodok quarter of Jakarta and the Masjid An-Nimah of Tanjung Anom in Surakarta, that were then (in the 1950s) run-down districts known for their criminal activities (Noor 2012: 37, 39).

It took the Tabligh several decades to establish a permanent presence in Southeast Asia. In 1955, the first Tablighi delegation to Indonesia established themselves at the Masjid Bandengan (which later came to be known as Masjid Pakistan) in North Jakarta; in 1957 they took control of the Masjid Jami' Kampung Jeruk in the city (Noor 2012: 36–37). Three decades later, in 1984, the Tablighis managed to gain control of the Pesantren Al-Fatah in Temboro, East Java, and Temboro would later become the main *markaz* (center) of Tabligh activities in Java and the rest of Indonesia (Noor 2012: 47). As in the case of Indonesia, the first Tablighis who travelled to Malaysia and Singapore (which gained independence in 1963 and formally broke away from Malaysia in 1965) found it relatively easy to establish contact and rapport with Malaysians and Singaporeans of South Asian descent, and it is not a surprise that their activities were initially

confined to fellow South Asian Muslims in both countries. The Tablighis would later establish a visible presence in places like Masjid India in Kuala Lumpur and Masjid Anguilla in Singapore, where they were in the company of Malaysians and Singaporeans who understood their language and shared similar dietary preferences. But in Singapore the Tabligh's big break came later, when Sidek Saniff (who would later serve as Singapore's Minister of State for the Environment) not only joined them, but eventually became their leader (Noor 2012: 50). In Thailand, the Tabligh's arrival was slightly more complex, as Tablighi delegations landed in the capital of Bangkok, while other delegations entered the provinces of Southern Thailand via the land border with the Northern Malaysian states of Kedah and Kelantan. From the outset, the Tabligh adopted a non-aggressive, non-confrontational approach, wary of inquisitive eyes and careful not to break the law in these countries.

Though the Tablighi Jama'at was a relative latecomer to the already overcrowded domain of Islamist movements, parties, and organizations that had taken root in Southeast Asia, the increased visibility of the movement in the region from the 1970s meant that it invariably came under academic scrutiny as well. Some of the earlier works on the Tabligh – as found in the writings of Nagata (1984) and Muzaffar (1986; 1987) – identified it as part of the then-current wave of Islamic/Islamist resurgence, and viewed it as a movement dedicated to bringing Islamic norms and behavior to the forefront of Muslim society. By contrast, works on the Tabligh that were written by South Asian-focused scholars at the same time saw it as part of the complex fabric of Indian social and religious life; Metcalf (1982; 2002), Sikand (1997; 1998; 2004; 2008), Masud (2000), and Reetz (2003; 2006) located the origins and development of the Tabligh in the Indian subcontinent within the framework of an enduring contest for hearts and minds among South Asian Muslims who had been struggling for more than a century to assert and defend a South Asian Muslim identity in the face of Hindu, Christian, and Modernist-secular challenges.

From the 1990s to the 2000s, a growing body of writing on the Tabligh in Southeast Asia was produced by scholars like Braam (2006), Horstmann (2007), and Noor (2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2012), with a tendency to base their findings on ground-level fieldwork and participant observation, as the itinerant character of the movement meant that it was important to study the complex workings of this pietist movement that was constantly moving. Against this was the backdrop of the growing bureaucratization of Islam in the region, thanks in part to the mainstreaming of political Islam and the manner in which some of the states of Southeast Asia – notably Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei – sought to legitimize their respective modes of governance and statecraft with recourse to the discourse of Islam, as noted in the studies by van Bruinessen (1994), Ichwan (2006), and Hefner (2000). The works of Noor, van Bruinessen, and Sikand (2008) and Feener and Sevea (2009) emphasized the transnational aspect of the Tabligh and movements like it, and noted that the fluid, flexible and constantly-evolving nature of such pietist movements meant that they were inherently anti-organizational/anti-structural – somewhat akin to Pierre Clastres' notion of the “society against the state” – and thus could not and should not be studied in a reductive manner that would reduce them to a homogenous singularity (Clastres 1989).

Lay piety in action: From texts to norms

As stated earlier, the Tablighi Jama'at has, from its inception, been a movement made up of lay Muslims from a diverse array of backgrounds, and is noted for its pious work and lifestyle rather than deep scriptural analysis or philosophical exegesis. Unlike the Deobandis of India, which can be described as an educational-scripturalist movement with its roots in the *madrasah*

education system (Sikand 1998; Metcalf 2002; Noor, van Bruinessen, and Sikand 2008; see also Khan in this volume), the itinerant nature of the Tabligh and its open membership means that literally anyone can become part of the movement, and this includes those whose knowledge of religion is rudimentary as well as those who can be described as “born again” Muslims.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Tabligh has always placed greater emphasis on Islamic norms and lifestyle, there now exists a respectable body of Tablighi-related literature in Southeast Asia, notably in Indonesia, where the foundational texts of the Tabligh movement such as the *Fadhilah al-Quran* and *Fadhilah Amal* – written by Maulana Muhammad Karariya al-Khandalawi – have been translated into the Indonesian language by members of the movement itself.¹ Scholars who have studied the Tabligh in Southeast Asia in detail have noted that apart from the Qur’an and *hadith*, the foundational texts of the movement remain the key reference works that are constantly discussed and consulted by the members of the movement during their study sessions while they reside (temporarily) in the mosques and *madrasahs* that have come under their control (Braam 2006; Horstmann 2007; Noor 2012).

What is also striking about the Tabligh in Southeast Asia, is how it has spawned a large body of vernacular lay literature with a special focus on the rites and rituals of mutuality and association among the Tabligh themselves. Unlike the foundational texts of the movement that are drier and more programmatic in form and content, this parallel body of lay vernacular writing is meant to appeal to the general membership of the movement, and is couched in language that is simple, accessible, and even humorous at times.

In Indonesia, in particular, there has emerged a small cottage industry of such popular writing, that often manifests itself in the form of small, thin, and cheap pocket-sized booklets that are bought and shared among the members of the movement themselves (Noor 2012: 89–112). Being of an affordable and portable nature, these handbooks offer a simple set of “how-to” guidelines that teach the members of the movement how to adapt to their new identity as members of the movement, and also how to present themselves while interacting with other Muslims (some of whom may have deep reservations about the Tabligh and its intentions, and may even been hostile to the movement and its individual members).

Among the works that fall within this broad category of popular Tabligh writing are those of Ustaz Husein al-Bama, Ustaz Abu Muhammad Fahim, Ustaz Mamat Djunaidi al-Hafidz Abdul Haq, Ustaz Yudha al-Hidayah, Ustaz Aboe Istiqomah, Ustaz Abu Salami, Ustaz Abdurrahman Ahmad As-Sirbuny, and the somewhat quirkily named Ustaz Haji Musa “al-Enjoy.” A cursory survey of the writings produced by these Tabligh writers would show that they mostly deal with the “why” question related to how and why anyone would embark on an itinerant life with the Tablighis in the first place. For writers like Ustaz Abu Muhammad Fahim (2008), Ustaz Mamat Djunaidi al-Hafidz Abdul Haq (2008), Ustaz Aboe Istiqomah (2009), Ustaz Abu Salami (2008), and Ustaz Haji Musa al-Enjoy (2009), the Tabligh is not merely a loose assembly of Muslims who happen to have decided to give up their worldly lifestyle and retire to the mosque, but is something far greater in purpose and scope: the work of the Tabligh is portrayed by them as nothing less than a vital and pious endeavor against the evil and corruption that plagues the modern world, and is cast in terms of a cosmological dialectic that pits the Muslim *umma* against the Devil and his cohort.

A crucial component of this struggle against the ways of the devil is the deliberate and conscious decision to break away from the norms of modern-day capitalist society that is laden with all its attendant evils: materialism, commercialism, luxury, politics, and the rat-race of consumerist society. Undoubtedly aware of how difficult such a departure can be for many of the members of the movement – who would have to explain the sudden change in their lifestyle to their families and friends – Tabligh writers such as Ustaz Abdurrahman Ahmad As-Sirbuny

and Ustaz Yudha al-Hidayah have written about the internal changes that are expected of the Tablighis themselves, and how the members may be better able to account for these transformations when dealing with non-members.

The theme of humble poverty has always been one of the key values of the movement. In his work, Ustaz Abdurrahman As-Siburny constantly reiterates the fact that the founding community of Muslims during the time of the Prophet lived simple and humble lives, and did not seek worldly gain in any way. His book *Untung Jadi Miskin* ("The Benefits of Poverty," 2006), for instance, is a work that extols the virtues of a humble life bereft of worldly attachment, and though in terms of its style of writing may appear to be somewhat pedestrian, the work nonetheless contains a radical message about the need for detachment from material pursuits, which in the long run leads to a form of self-liberation from the demands of modern-day consumerist society. In tandem with the message of Ustaz As-Siburny's work, is that of Ustaz Yudha al-Hidayah, whose *Ada Apa Ke India? Negeri Yang Enjoy* ("Why Go to India? The land where we Enjoy"; Ustaz Yudha al-Hidayah 2008) speaks of the greatness of India as a place where Muslims can and should go to in order to break free from the norms of society around them, and as a place of spiritual renewal.

A recurring theme in these works is the somewhat Tabligh-specific understand of "enjoyment" and what it means to "enjoy" life in a Tabligh way: the upshot of the arguments contained in the works mentioned above is that the Tabligh is a movement that seeks to liberate its members from the shackles of modern society, and that true contentment – understood here in terms of freedom from worldliness and material concerns – can only be found when one detaches oneself from the world of things and objects around us. Again and again, these Tabligh writers continue to remind their readers that the Tablighi way of life is by no means an improper innovation (*bid'a*) of any sort, and that the life of humility and detachment they have chosen for themselves is one that is based on the model of the Prophet himself and the first community of Muslims at the birth of Islam itself. In fact, the concept of unlawful innovation (*bid'a*) is an important idea among Tabligh thinkers and members, for the movement has always emphasized that its form of life is entirely correct and based on the example set by the Prophet and his companions. Conversely, "innovation" is seen by them as a corrupting influence that came about thanks to the emergence of Muslim polities that in turn paved the way for power, wealth, and luxury. In this respect the Tablighis' stance against materialism and worldliness echoes that of the historian Abu Zayd Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who had likewise regarded the civilization of sedentary societies as debilitating and ultimately corrupting (see Rabi'1967).

Though the Tablighis regard themselves as the literal followers of the prophetic ideal type, and have modelled themselves on the community of the first Muslims, they have always known that they were, and remain, one among many Muslim movements in the world today, and are also acutely aware of the fact that their way of life and their understanding of religious piety may not be everyone's cup of tea. To that end, several Tabligh writers have also written guidebooks to help the members of the movement defend their stance on things, and in particular to deflect criticism from those who regard the movement as little more than an assembly of world-weary outliers who have disengaged from society and politics altogether. Ustaz Husein al-Bama's *Dialog Fiktif Salafy vs Jamaah Tabligh* ("A fictional dialogue between a Tablighi and a Salafi"; Ustaz Husein al-Bama 2008) is an example of one such work, where an imaginary dialogue is orchestrated between a Tablighi member and a critic of the movement. Composed in the form of a fictional one-on-one dialogue that proceeds along the path of a questions-and-answers, it presents the readers with a list of the most common criticisms of the Tablighis (that they are fatalists, that they have abandoned their families, that their renunciation of politics renders

Muslims weak and defenseless, etc.) followed by the most appropriate replies (that the world is impermanent, that only God and the hereafter are eternal, that God in his love and wisdom will never abandon the faithful, that politics is worldly and power is corrupting, etc.).

Such defensive literature is a reminder of the Tabligh's South Asian origins, and how it emerged in India at a time when the Indian Muslim community was apprehensive about its status and future in the face of both Christian missionary activism and Hindu revivalism (Sikand 1997; 2004). As such, it is not surprising that the Tablighs also spend a considerable amount of time preparing themselves not only for their itinerant missionary work, but also to defend their creed in the face of external challenges. Such writings are found in other parts of Southeast Asia as well, and one such work is Ustaz Haydar Ali Tajuddin bin Fateh Muhammad's *Sepuluh Perkara Yang Biasa Dibangkitkan oleh Mubaligh Kristian untuk Menentang Islam* ("The Ten Most Common Issues Raised by Christian Missionaries Against Islam"; Ustaz Haydar Ali Tajuddin bin Fateh Muhammad n.d.), which happens to be a Malay translation of the work by the Muslim preacher Zakir Naik, published in Kelantan, Malaysia.

Piety in a globalized world: The Tablighi Jama'at today

The Tablighi Jama'at remains as one of the biggest movements of faith renewal in the contemporary modern world, and it is present across all of Southeast Asia as it is in every part of the world. Every single country in the ASEAN region has a Tablighi presence, and in some of these countries – notably Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore – the movement has grown visible and has made it into the mainstream of society. The most notable features of this mass movement of lay Muslim missionaries are its constant mobility (with millions of its members constantly moving from mosque to mosque and crossing borders on a regular basis), and the openness of its membership.² This has made the Tabligh not only a dynamic movement that is constantly evolving and adapting to the realities of the changing world, but it has also created an organization that is loose and flexible, and therefore less inclined towards the creation of formal hierarchical structures – and thus less prone to internal divisions and squabbles for power, which has been the bane of many other religious movements and has accounted for the schisms among them. Indeed, one of the most enduring aspects of the Tablighi Jama'at is that it has not experienced any major divisions throughout its history, and remains largely intact – albeit as a fluid movement that does not have any fixed structural-institutional boundaries.

This does not, however, mean that the Tablighi is entirely free of problems and challenges. By way of conclusion, I highlight several factors that have impacted upon the Tabligh in recent times, and which may pose a challenge to the survival of this minority activist movement in the years to come.

Apolitical by nature? The Tablighi Jama'at's curious relationship with/to power and politics

Since the late nineteenth century, the Muslim world has witnessed the resurgence of Islamic political movements and the development of Islamist political thought. Movements like the Ikhwan'ul Muslimin, the Jamaat-e Islami, and Islamist parties such as the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party of Malaysia and the myriad of Islamist movements like the Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama in Indonesia, have vied for the hearts and minds of the Muslim community the world over, giving rise to a wide range of Islamist parties that we see all over the world today. What brings all these religio-political organizations and parties together is their desire for state capture, and to gain control of the apparatus of the state in order to Islamize politics and to govern

their respective societies according to an Islamic moral and ideological framework which they regard as the correct mode of statecraft for Muslim societies.

Against this long tradition of Islamist politics has been the parallel tradition of non-political Muslim movements that have either avoided political contestation altogether, or even regarded political contestation as the root cause of the downfall of Muslim society. Such movements include the wide range of Sufi orders as well as “alternative” forms of Muslim social organization, including the Darul Arqam movement that was active in Malaysia from the 1970s to the 1990s. Included in this list is the Tablighi Jama'at, which has always rejected all forms of worldly attachment and the values of liberal-capitalist-materialist society. Although there have been many members of the Tablighi Jama'at who were themselves directly involved in politics at one stage of their lives – among the notable examples of this was the leader of the Tabligh in Singapore, Sidek Sanif, who joined the Tabligh when he was serving as a minister in the Singapore cabinet (Noor 2012: 135, 138–139) – the movement remains largely non-political and can even be described as apolitical.

The non-political nature and appearance of the Tabligh was one of the reasons why it was largely accepted and tolerated by the governments of Southeast Asia when it first arrived, and it was later allowed to spread its influence across the respective countries of the region. Southeast Asia had experienced a long – and sometimes violent – relationship with other variants of political Islam in the past, and as Che Man (1990) has shown, there have been a number of anti-state separatist movements in the region that have based their political struggles on the discourse of political Islam before. Compounding matters from the first decade of the twenty-first century has been the rise of radical militant movements – in Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia – that have waged struggles against their respective governments as well as other religious communities in the region. The Tabligh, however, has generally steered clear from such activities as it focused on its own work and maintained the mode of low-risk activism that has been its norm from the outset, leading some scholars to conclude that such schools of traditionalist-Salafist thought are less inclined (though not immune) to radical ideas (e.g., ICG 2004). In Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, in particular, the mainstreaming of the Tabligh has been further facilitated by the membership of prominent celebrities and high-profile political leaders.

In Indonesia, the Tabligh was able to thrive and grow in the 1960s–1980s thanks to its apolitical character that placed it in good stead with the Suharto regime that was deeply suspicious of all forms of political Islam. In that time and context, being apolitical was actually an asset to the Tabligh, and may account for how and why it managed to survive during the three decades of Suharto's New Order government. This holds equally true in the Malay-Muslim provinces of Southern Thailand that witnessed the rise of separatist movements from the 1960s onwards (Che Man 1990), and where the Tabligh was careful not to be dragged into such local conflicts as it built its local network of members and contacts.

In countries like Malaysia, the Tabligh was initially seen as a positive influence among wayward youth, and was praised for its success in turning drug addicts to better Muslims, and by extension better citizens. But its reluctance to get itself involved in overt political activity or to encourage its members to involve themselves in political affairs, also meant that it was seen as a potential rival by Islamist parties; the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party saw the Tabligh as a self-defeating movement that focused too much on personal salvation, rather than the political-economic betterment of the Muslim community in general.³ This opened up the possibility for another critique of the Tablighi Jama'at to emerge: namely that the movement was essentially fatalist in outlook and unable to resolve the political-economic problems of the world around them.

Salvation or fatalism? The persistent view of the Tablighi Jama'at as pious fatalists

Amidst widespread panic about the spread of COVID-19 across Southeast Asia, in March 2020 one of the events that triggered further fear was the news that a considerable number of Tablighis who had attended a large gathering at the *markaz* in Gowa (Sulawesi) had not only caught the virus, but also contributed to its spread after they returned to their respective home countries.⁴ In Malaysia, several members of the movement had tested positive when they were checked, and there was further worry that many of the Tablighis had simply returned to their respective towns and villages without taking any precautions to stop the spread of the disease. From Gowa, the virus then spread to other Tablighi centers across the region, and the Tabligh center at Sri Petaling in Malaysia later became the next hotspot, with many other cases of infection discovered.⁵

It was during the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia that attention was drawn once again to the Tablighi Jama'at, and questions were raised in the media and the public domain about how and why such a large and mobile organization was allowed to continue with its activities without taking the proper precautions to safeguard the health of its members and the rest of society. In Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei, mosques were temporarily closed, and religious authorities issued clear instructions regarding public prayer and the use of mosques. In Indonesia, some Islamist movements were far more proactive, and the Indonesian Muhammadiyah organization was one of the first to form its own Muhammadiyah COVID Command Center (MCCC), offering relief to those struck by the disease, and also pursuing public information campaigns to raise awareness about the virus.⁶ But while Muslim organizations and authorities across the region were quick to react and offer new guidelines to their respective faith communities, the Tabligh continued in its work regardless of the gravity of the situation.

Media reports in Indonesia and Malaysia offered anecdotal accounts of how ordinary Tablighis regarded the COVID-19 pandemic as a trial sent by God, and that to continue with their pious work was more important than death itself. (In this regard it ought to be noted that similar sentiments were at the same time echoed by Evangelical Christian groups in the United States, with members arguing that serving God was more important than eluding death.) What the crisis brought to the fore, was the perception of the Tabligh as a movement that was both fatalist and other-worldly, and which was even less understood by those who had no familiar experience with it. It also reinforced the view that the movement was not only cut off from the realities of the world, but was also un-scientific and in some respects even anti-social.

The damage done to the image of the Tablighi Jama'at was considerable, coming as it did at a time when mass panic was on the rise and the pandemic was little understood. But underlying the different views of the movement – seen by members from the inside, and non-members from the outside – was the fact that the Tabligh has always operated according to a different final moral vocabulary from other movements in the Muslim world. As the Tabligh has always seen the world of the here-and-now as a test of virtue and faith, it has always held the view that attachment to all things worldly – politics, wealth, status, and even family ties – were secondary to the will and commandments of God. In the literature of the movement that we have touched upon earlier, the theme of honorable sacrifice, and the willingness to give everything to the cause, has always been emphasized as one of the cardinal virtues of Muslim life. Basing its outlook on the exemplary tales of the first community of Muslims who had suffered and sacrificed everything they had to fulfill the commandments of God, the Tablighis still believe that detachment from all worldly concerns is the key to self-realization as true Muslims in the world today

(e.g., As-Sirbuny 2006). The problem remains, however, that the Tablighis – notwithstanding their vast numbers – remain a minority among Muslims, and, as such, this particular worldview does not always sit well with the mainstream view of the Muslim community in general.

A movement without solutions? The Tablighi Jama'at in the constellation of Muslim thought

It has to be remembered that despite its size and its *modus operandi*, the Tablighi Jama'at is and has always been an orthodox conservative traditionalist-literalist lay Muslim missionary movement whose doctrines have not departed from mainstream Sunni orthodoxy in any way. While some scholars like Metcalf (2002) have pointed to the Sufi leanings of the movement in terms of everyday praxis and the missionary work that the Tabligh has conducted, the fact remains that much of the work done by the Tablighi Jama'at – their mobile excursions from one mosque to another, their door-to-door calling at Muslim households, etc. – has been of a mundane and pedestrian nature.

As noted earlier, the Tablighis differ from other Muslim movements such as the Deobandis on account of their pragmatic approach to Muslim missionary work. Unlike the Deobandis, who have focused on scriptural study and exegesis, the Tablighis have retained their mode of missionary activism that has remained relatively unchanged since the founding of the movement almost a century ago. Scholars who have done fieldwork with and among the Tablighis in Southeast Asia (Braam 2006; Horstmann 2007; Noor 2008; 2010; 2012) have noted the ordinary-ness of Tabligh life and work on a daily basis, which often takes on the appearance of a routinized form of religious activity.⁷ While such routinization has to be understood as part and parcel of the Tabligh's lived experience and a component of the process of self-disciplining that is central to becoming a Tablighi, it also means that relatively less time is devoted to scholarly matters such as deep hermeneutical analysis or textual exegesis. Thus, while the growth of the Tabligh in terms of its membership has been exponential, the same cannot be said of the literature it has produced over the past few decades.

In the present global market of ideas, the simplicity of the Tabligh approach and way of life may be attractive to some, but it may also pose a challenge to the movement in the long run. As noted earlier, the movement is seen with suspicion by some Islamist parties and movements on account of its passive quietism and its apolitical nature, which renders it politically passive and ineffective. The Muslim world today however is beset with problems and challenges that impact upon humanity as a whole, and these include global warming and the environmental crisis, the contradictions of late post-industrial capitalism, the loss of faith and confidence in the state and political institutions, the absence of trust in society, etc. While facing these daunting challenges that now seem to threaten the very existence of the human species, Muslims and non-Muslims alike are seeking viable and practical solutions to the problems of modern-day society, and even the Islamist parties and movements that had grown in numbers and presence from the mid-twentieth century are now forced to grapple with such issues in order to demonstrate their relevance.⁸ Whether the Tablighi Jama'at can also evolve in tandem with the times is a question that can only be answered in the future. For almost a century this lay missionary movement for faith renewal has been able to survive and expand across the world thanks to its quietism and non-confrontational approach, and in the course of doing so has provided purpose and meaning to the lives of millions of its followers. But as humanity looks to the future and stares at its possible extinction as a result of the workings of unfettered industrial capitalism, the question remains as to whether piety alone can save the world from itself.

Notes

- 1 For more on the extensive translations of the works of the founders of the Tablighi Jama'at into the Indonesian language, see al-Khandalawi (2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2006).
- 2 Over the years when I conducted fieldwork with and among the Tablighis in Southeast Asia, I came across Tablighis from all over the world, and was also told of the movement of the Indonesian Tablighis themselves. The itineraries of these lay missionaries were varied, and some of them had ventured far beyond the borders of their own country – travelling much further than many other ordinary Indonesians have ever done. While interviewing Tablighis in their *markaz* in West Papua province, for example, I met several Tablighis who had travelled from West Papua to Jakarta, and then on to Singapore, China, Japan, and all the way to Peru. In the Tanjung Anom mosque of Surabaya and the Temboro Markaz in East Java, I met up with Tablighis from all over Southeast Asia, as well as those who had come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Yemen.
- 3 During my interview with the late spiritual leader (*Murshid'ul Am*) of the Malaysian Islamic Party PAS, Ustaz Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the latter opined that the Tablighis were “too Indian” in their outlook and that the movement was somehow “contaminated” by Hindu ideas and a fatalistic tendency. He regarded the Tablighis as well meaning in intention, but foolish in their belief that the political problems faced by Muslims could be resolved by piety alone (Noor 2012: 172–174).
- 4 The Tabligh gathering in the town of Gowa took place between February 27 to March 1, and was said to have been attended by around 16,000 members of the movement. See: “Malaysians returning from Tabligh event must be screened,” in: <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/19/hisham-malaysians-returning-from-indonesia-tabligh-event-must-be-screened-f/1848062>
- 5 <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/575560/how-sri-petaling-tabligh-became-southeast-asias-covid-19-hotspot>
- 6 <https://covid19.muhammadiyah.id/tentang-kami/tim-kami/>
- 7 Over the years that I conducted fieldwork with the Tabligh in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, I noted that most of the evening discussions that were conducted in their various centers and mosques were about lessons in piety and the need to safeguard the virtues of Muslims. The Tablighis I met were committed to upholding what they regarded as traditional Muslim life and values, and this included their defense of polygamy as well as their rejection of worldly riches. Though choosing a life of humility and poverty is not unique to Muslims (it is also a common theme among many Christian brotherhoods such as the Benedictines and Franciscans) there were fewer philosophical discussions about the dangers of materialism or critiques of the liberal-capitalist economy (Noor 2012).
- 8 An instance of such engagement can be seen in the work of the Malaysian Islamic Youth Organization (ABIM), which was one of the first and largest Islamist NGOs in Malaysia founded in the 1970s. During its heyday ABIM had captured the hearts and minds of an entire generation of Muslim youth in the country as it sought to bring about an “Islamization from below” in the country, but in recent times has had to address new concerns such as the global environmental crisis. ABIM now has branches and wings in other domains such as Women’s issues (Helwa-ABIM) as well as environmental activism (GRASS-Malaysia). In this respect the evolution of ABIM has shown how many Islamist movements and organizations have also evolved in order to address the issues of the present.

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A TREE ENROOTED

African Sufi saints as “lineage deities” of a Muslim community of East African ancestry in Western India (Gujarat and Mumbai)

Jazmin Graves

The turn of the twenty-first century brought darkness and bloodshed to the city of Ahmedabad. One of the worst communal riots in the history of post-independence India wracked Gujarat state in 2002, with nearly half of all deaths occurring in Ahmedabad (Spodek 2011: 248–270). Strategic acts of terror dealt crushing blows to the state’s Muslim minority, displacing hundreds of thousands, destroying businesses and subjecting women to sadistic brutality. “Even the dead were not immune from attack. In efforts to blot out glories of the Muslim legacy in Ahmedabad, tombs of revered saints and scholars were vandalized, destroyed, and paved over, sometimes with state resources” (Spodek 2011: 257). Among those targeted in the violence were an ethnic minority within the state’s Muslim minority: Sidis, a community of East African origin who maintain the shrines (*dargah*) of African Sufi ancestor-saints who have lain entombed in Gujarat for over six centuries (Graves 2019).

The tomb complex of Bava Gor, his siblings, and other members of his saintly entourage in Ratanpur, a remote village in the Bharuch district of Gujarat state, has historically been a site of ethnic and religious pluralism (Basu 2004a). This ethos developed over at least two centuries of interaction between Sidi custodians of the shrine and other residents of the locality, including Hindu and Adivasi (indigenous) communities. Among the latter, Bhils held longstanding ties to Bava Gor, whom they venerated as the patron saint of the agate bead industry in which they participated. Helene Basu (2003: 237), pioneering anthropologist of Gujarat’s Sidi community, observes that

the Habshi [Abyssinian] saint Bava Gor is not only venerated by people involved in beadmaking but represents the focus of a regional cult in which the Sidi act as religious specialists mediating the favours of this and many other related saints all classified as black, Sidi, saints.

This devotional tradition centers on the figure of Bava Gor, variously remembered as an innovative agate merchant, a saint of the Rifai Sufi order, and one of many Habshi “elite” military slaves drawn into the subcontinent from the Horn of Africa (Kenoyer and Bhan 2004;

Graves 2020: 97–99; Varadarajan 2020). “By eclectically combining and mixing Sufi, Bhil, Hindu and African cultural elements,” Basu synthesizes, “the cult of Gori Pir [Bava Gor] can be understood as a new, uniquely creolised cultural production that has been brought about by the interactions of Sidi with their social environment” (Basu 2004a: 67).

The dispersal of Africans in Gujarat and their acculturation to a multireligious environment facilitated the emergence of a multifaceted devotional tradition at the shrine of the African Sufi saint Bava Gor. This exemplifies the fact that

Many, if not most Muslims live amidst other religions and traditions, their cultural roots intertwining, complementing and competing not as isolated transplants but as part of a forest of local character that involves them in the lives of others at a level that transcends religion.

Gottschalk 2004: 14

The body of beliefs and practices this chapter identifies as the “Sidi Sufi devotional tradition” encompasses Muslim Sidis’ veneration of African Rifai Sufis (foremost among them the sibling triad Bava Gor, Mai Misra, and Bava Habash) and elite African Muslim political or military figures as ancestor-saints, along with the veneration of other individuals associated with them, who are entombed or otherwise enshrined throughout Gujarat and Mumbai (Jeychandran 2020). This chapter illuminates the ways in which the Sidi Sufi devotional tradition is enrooted in the religious and cultural ecology of western India (for a study of African Muslim scholars in the subcontinent, see Kooria in this volume).

The chapter frames its discussion with Sidis’ recollections of a harrowing incident from the 2002 riots in Ahmedabad. Sidis’ close encounter with anti-Muslim communal violence galvanized by absolutist politics belies the entrenchment of their devotional tradition and community identity in the cultural fabric of the nation of their birth. Moving to excerpts of legal statements composed in the early 1980s and published by Basu in 2003, the chapter illustrates Sidi community leaders’ own articulations of the multivalence of their devotional tradition and identity in relation to other Muslims. These statements conceive of Bava Gor in terms of a deity to whom the Sidi community has been bound in worship over the generations, one of many self-conscious acknowledgements of the intertwining of Hindu beliefs and practices within the Sidi devotional tradition.

These statements establish the groundwork for the chapter’s analysis of Mai Misra’s representation in Sidi devotional songs and her veneration in a ritual context called “Mai Misra’s *Khichri*,” which likewise suggests the female Muslim saint’s conceptualization in terms of a Hindu goddess. Mai Misra’s *kalas*, a clay or metal jar that features ubiquitously in Mai Misra’s death anniversary (*urs*) observances, has a distinctive role in a *Khichri* ceremony performed in Ahmedabad. The form and function of Mai Misra’s *kalas* in the *Khichri* ceremony draw directly from the material culture of Hindu goddess worship in India, suggesting the Hindu *ghatasthapana*, the ritual installation of a clay or metal jar (*ghat*, *kalas*) as a gynomorphic embodiment of a Hindu goddess. Relative to a carved or printed image, the aniconic nature of the jar-form of a Hindu goddess allows for its use in an Islamic devotional tradition in veneration of a female Sufi saint (Ruffle, in this volume, discusses Fatimah’s grinding stone at the Shah-e Mardan complex in New Delhi). These analyses underscore the ways in which the Sidi Sufi tradition draws from the religious culture of its environment to configure the interpretive framework for its devotional mode and the performative idiom of its rituals.

This chapter’s study of the Sidi Sufi tradition of Gujarat and Mumbai contributes to academic discourse on literary and material cultures and Sufi ritual practices as they evidence

accommodation, reinterpretation, and exchange between Hindu and Muslim communities in South Asia (Ahmad and Reifeld 2014; Behl 2012; Ernst 2009; Flood 2009; Alam 1996; see also the contributions by Tschacher, Tontini, Steinhardt, Rasmussen, Arjana, and Xavier in this volume). Departing from the language of “syncretism” to analyze the agents, products, and motives of such exchange, scholars have engaged the concept of “liminality” to illuminate interstitial texts, identities, and devotional practices (Ahmad and Reifeld 2004). This chapter views the liminality of Mai Misra’s identity as a Sufi saint conceived and venerated in terms of a Hindu goddess as an expression of multivocality, by which one symbol accrues multiple meanings based on its circulation in a multi-religious environment (Orsini 2014: 228). The *kalas*, composed and installed by Hindus in worship of a goddess or by Sidi Muslims in remembrance of their ancestor-saint Mai Misra, is one such symbol. The devotional songs, rituals, and material culture of the Sidi Sufi tradition thus encode the process by which Muslims of African ancestry dispersed in Gujarat established community on the basis of devotion to African Sufi saints entombed in Gujarat while acculturating to the motifs and paradigms of their environment.

The intervention of the saints: Bava Gor as protector of the Sidi community

Three Sidi women and one Sidi man recollect the frightful days of the 2002 riots, when reportedly 50,000 Hindus converged on their neighborhood in Ahmedabad. “Against 50,000, what can 300 do?” one of the women questions wearily. The mobs were reputedly so vicious that they had severed a fetus from a pregnant woman’s body and burned it alive. The police were ambivalent. They knew and respected the local Sidi community’s elder and were therefore willing to help her with such matters as procuring food during the citywide lockdown. Nevertheless, some Sidis report that when they called the emergency number, no help came.

Meanwhile, the Sidi elder’s phone had been ringing incessantly, with Hindus and Muslims alike calling her for help. Sidis had grown up with the Hindus who lived near them, playing together and attending the same schools. Those Hindu friends would even come to the Sidis’ neighborhood to visit the *dargah* there, a memorial shrine commemorating nine Sufi saints. Several of these are African ancestor-saints of the Sidi community, such as Bava Gor and his sister Mai Misra, whose shrines throughout Gujarat – especially their tomb complex in Bharuch district – are patronized by Indians of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. But if any such people were to have opposed the violent mobs, they would have been killed. Some of them fled to the Sidis for protection, who sheltered them.

A number of these Hindu friends saw the “miracle” that occurred when tens of thousands of rioters descended upon the Sidis’ neighborhood. Bottles and stones flew between both fronts, though police presence had reached the site. A stone hurled from the mob’s side hit a police officer, who retaliated and routed the rioters. Later, Hindu friends visited the Sidis and asked them, “How did you get all of those horsemen to protect you?” “Horsemen?” they echoed blankly. “We didn’t have any horsemen.” Mounted guards had appeared between the mob and the neighborhood. Sidis could not see them, but Hindus could. The horsemen even stayed overnight, reassuring the police officers who had stayed behind to guard the area, yet were too frightened to sleep: “You go to sleep. We are here. *Ap so jao. Ham yahan hain.*” These talking apparitions were the merciful intervention, if not the self-disclosure, of the saints memorialized at the shrine. “Some people have questions about Bava Gor and Mai Misra,” one Sidi woman reflects, “but those who know the old stories know that Bava Gor protected us. This is why we love him, and we believe in him.”

The case of the Ahmedabad shrine's targeting during the 2002 riots demonstrates that the complex, multivalent identity of the tradition and its custodians are overshadowed by the politics of cultural insiderism. Cultural insiderism hinges upon a sense of ethnic absolutism which in turn contours the ideal of the nation in terms of ethnic homogeneity (Gilroy 1993: 2–3). In the context of Hindu nationalist politics, Hindutva (“Hindu-ness”) as the supposed authentic character of the nation and its citizens, is the mode of absolutism which positions Muslim minorities as cultural outsiders and motivates communal violence. This absolutist perspective effaces the heterogeneity of Indian Muslim communities that bespeaks their inextricable integration in the cultural fabric of the land of their (and generations of their ancestors’) birth.

Likewise, academic and theological studies of Islam that lend excessive focus to a “distant heartland,” or to texts positioned as the standard of the religion, delegitimize the beliefs and practices of contemporary Muslims who are culturally enrooted in localities beyond that heartland (Gottschalk 2004: 17). Gottschalk, mobilizing Gilroy’s theme of “roots and routes,” asserts,

The categorization of Muslims according to the cultural roots of their contemporary lives and not simply their historical routes from some distant heartland demands a three-dimensional map that encompasses the multiple identities and diverse layers of individual self-expression and interpersonal relationships.

Gottschalk 2004: 17

In response, this chapter cross-sections the “multiple identities” of the African Muslim ancestor-saints at the heart of the Sidi Sufi tradition to identify the “diverse layers” of ritual expression and devotional relationships with these saints that engender the multivocality of the Sidi devotional tradition.

Bava Gor as “lineage god (*kuldevta*)” of the Sidi community

In the early 1980s, Sidi community leaders appealed to the Office of the Charity Commissioner of Gujarat, which had constituted a board of trustees to manage the affairs of Bava Gor’s *dargah* in Ratanpur. Sidi leaders sought to reclaim control over their ancestral shrine from members of a different Muslim community who had come to dominate its board of trustees (Basu 2003, Basu 2004a). Published excerpts of Sidi leaders’ legal statements provide a solid point of departure for analyzing Sidis’ reflexivity regarding their devotional tradition. These documents record a self-conscious effort to articulate the polyvalence of their tradition; the statements incorporate select terminology that affirms their identity as Muslims yet conveys the sheer distance of their shrine-based traditions from what would be intelligible to their challengers as Islam, expressing rather their direct proximity to Hindu beliefs and devotional rituals. While outside contenders based their claims to the shrine on their devotion, as Muslims, to the Muslim saints buried thereat, the Sidi petitioners mobilized caste-based norms of worship and profession drawn from the dominant religio-cultural milieu to express their ancestral connection to Bava Gor and, therefore, their exclusive rights to his shrine.

One statement outlines the relationship between Bava Gor and the Muslim Sidi community (Basu 2003: 238–239). It identifies Bava Gor as an “*awliya*” or Sufi saint and locates Mecca, as the birthplace of Islam, as his point of departure on his journey to Gujarat. This communicates the legitimacy of Bava Gor and his siblings, Bava Habash and Mai Misra, as Sufi saints. The statement proposes that the three were all Sidis, and that the male saints are the forebears of the contemporary Sidi community.¹ The statement then sketches the expanse of the Sidi community and its network of ancestor-saint shrines throughout Gujarat, eastward to the city of

Mumbai in the neighboring state of Maharashtra, and southeastward to Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana state in southern central India, highlighting the localities which Muslim Sidis generally populate.² The statement affirms Bava Gor as a Sufi saint and forbear of the Sidi community in order to validate his Sidi “descendants” as a legitimate Muslim community. This reads as a challenge to those Muslims vying for control over Bava Gor’s shrine based on their self-identification as Muslim devotees of Bava Gor as a Sufi saint: not only are Sidis themselves Muslim, they are the descendants of Bava Gor and therefore the rightful custodians of his shrine (Basu 2004a: 72).

Sidis’ claim to ownership of the shrine rests upon an ancestral relationship to the saints conceived in terms of natural kinship, by which Sidis view the saints as their ancestors, and in terms of a generational history of devotional service (Basu 2003: 239–240). The statements appeal to terminology and place names that characterize Bava Gor and his descendants as legitimate Muslims, yet assertively distinguish Sidis’ relationship with Bava Gor as unique from any devotional relationship that other Muslims might have with the saint. One statement self-consciously declares, “According to Muslim religion, Muslims do not do any other form of worship except their own and pray to no one except Allah. We, the people of the Sidi community are different” (Basu 2003: 239). Another statement clarifies the terms of this distinction: “Till [sic] today we consider Bava Gor a *kuldevta* (lineage god) and show our respect by doing *pujavidhi* (rituals)” (Basu 2003: 240). The terms *kuldevta* and *pujavidhi* derive from Hindu religious contexts and refer to a deity (*devta*) and the method (*vidhi*) of worship (*puja*) of a deity. A *kuldevta* is a deity worshipped by a particular kinship group (*kul*) over generations; the *kuldevta*, in exchange, is believed to perpetuate that lineage by protecting and providing for its members (Harlan 1992). The term *kuldevta* thus communicates the unique dynamic between the Sidi descendant-devotee and the Sidi ancestor-saint, underscoring the former’s singular rights to the latter’s shrine over the claims of any Muslim outside of the Sidi community.

Regardless of physical proximity to a memorial shrine (*chilla*) of an ancestor-saint, Sidi families tend to maintain small household shrines (also called *chilla*) dedicated to one or more ancestor-saints. This practice evidences Sidis’ singular relationship to the ancestor-saints construed as deities attached to the kinship groups comprising the Sidi community (*jamat*), a dynamic derived from Hindu contexts. An image of a Hindu deity may be housed in a temple (*mandir*) attended by priests and open to visitation by worshippers; household temples (also called *mandir*) in a Hindu family’s home provide a space for worshipping the family’s *kuldevta*. For example, members of a particular patrilineal kinship group from Veda village in Gujarat worship the goddess Khodiyar Ma as their *kuldevi* (lineage goddess); while Veda is home to one of the goddess’ many temples throughout Gujarat, a family from the aforementioned kinship group living in the urban center of Ahmedabad worships Khodiyar Ma in their household temple alongside images of other pan-Hindu deities. Sidis’ maintenance of private, household shrines dedicated to one or more ancestor-saints similarly reflects their ancestral bond to the saints, articulated in the Sidi leaders’ statements in terms of a *kuldevta*–*kul* dynamic.

The term *kuldevta* is not exclusively used to identify the Sidi Sufi saints in relation to their Sidi devotees. The saints are also referred to as *kuldada* or *kuldadi*, compound nouns which substitute *devta* (deity) with *dada* (paternal grandfather) and *dadi* (paternal grandmother) (Basu 2004b: 237). These identifiers also emphasize the saints’ conceptualization as ancestors of the Sidi community. Sidi interlocutors in Ahmedabad identify the ancestor-saints by the term *kulpir* (lineage saints), which substitutes “deity” or “grandparent” for *pir*, (spiritual guide), a title for a Sufi saint (Basu 1998: 87). This term conveys the same notion of an ancestral relationship to the saint through generations of devotional service, but foregrounds the object of devotion as a

Sufi saint or spiritual guide rather than as a deity. While Bava Gor and Mai Misra are generally revered as *kulpir* of the entire Sidi community, various clans (*atak*) within the community may secondarily venerate other ancestor-saints as the *kulpir* of that particular kinship group. This reinforces the notion of ancestral links binding Sidi lineages with Sidi ancestor-saints.

The statements enumerate some of the rituals by which Sidis venerate Bava Gor. These include praying to Bava Gor by reciting *jikar* (also pronounced *jikro* and *jikri*, cognate of *dhikr*), which are glossed as Swahili prayers, and by performing a dance called *goma* or *dhammal* (Basu 2003: 238).³ This devotional music and ecstatic dance performance, with its musical instruments of African origin, evokes the *ngoma* institutions of central, eastern, and southern Africa (Basu 2008; Janzen 1992; Larsen 2008; Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2004; 2010). Amongst the rituals of the Sidi ancestor-saint shrine, the performance of *jikar* and *dhammal* bespeaks the African heritage of the Sidi Sufi tradition, its custodians and its saints. Yet the same statements also assert that Sidis' customs are comparable to those of Hindu ascetic orders and define the type of worship conducted at the *dargah* as "*puja*" (Basu 2003: 238–239). This characterization of the ritual practices at the shrine of Bava Gor underscores the multivalence of the Sidi Sufi tradition, born of African cultural elements enrooted in a plural religious context in western India.

The statements outline the performance of these rituals as the distinct profession of Sidis. This notion is tied to occupation-based concepts of caste in India, by which a specific caste may traditionally be responsible for a specific occupation. The statements draw from the logic of the surrounding sociocultural milieu in which profession and caste often correlate to identify the ancestral profession of the Sidi community as inextricably linked to the shrine of Bava Gor. Sidi leaders' linking their community with a particular ancestral profession illuminates the definition of the term *jamat* as "caste" in this social context in western India (Basu 2003: 238, 241; Gottschalk 2004: 15; Misra 1964: 139, 129–149). The concept of caste as a factor binding Muslim Sidis to the devotional service of Bava Gor reinforces the *kuldevta-kul* dynamic characterizing this relationship.

Having asserted to "outside Muslims" that Bava Gor is a Muslim saint and that Muslim Sidis are his descendants, the statements attempt to convince the Office of the Charity Commissioner that allowing just any Muslim to run the shrine will endanger and ultimately alienate its diverse clientele (Basu 2003: 239). Members of any other Muslim caste would be completely unversant with, if not scornful of, those aspects of the shrine's rituals which draw from Sidis' eastern African heritage and are paramount to the rituals' efficacy; only Sidi Muslims, whose ancestral profession is the worship of Bava Gor, can correctly administer these rituals to facilitate communication with Bava Gor and provide solutions for seekers at the shrine. Basu notes the precarious position in which this appeal to the polyvalence of the Sidi Sufi tradition places the petitioners: the ambiguity of the Sidi Sufi tradition is simply incomprehensible in an administrative context that conceives of bounded, monolithic religious identities (Basu 2003: 240–241; see also Morgenstein Fuerst in this volume on the creation of South Asia's "Muslims" as a monolithic group).

The Sidi leaders' statements suggest that they perceive their community as sharing the Muslim religious and African ethnic identities of their ancestor-saints. However, they are acutely aware of the ways in which their devotional tradition is enrooted in the religious culture of their environment, locating them outside of the scope of what their challengers, from a different Muslim caste, might be inclined to believe or practice. One of the most accentuated indications of this difference is the Sidi leaders' conceptualization of their community's devotional relationship with Bava Gor in terms of a *kuldevta-kul* dynamic. As in Hindu contexts, this foregrounds a bond formed between a kinship group and its object of devotion over

generations of worship. Sidi custodianship at the shrine of Bava Gor is documented in the early nineteenth century, indicating that their devotional relationship with Bava Gor spans at least 200 years (Basu 2004a: 62). Defining this as a *kuldevta-kul* relationship also encodes the history of community formation amongst Africans dispersed in Gujarat.

Mai Misra as lineage saint (*kulpir*) and lineage goddess (*kuldevi*) of the Sidi community

Since at least the early nineteenth century, the shrine of Bava Gor magnetized displaced Africans, especially those fleeing servitude, who established a community at the shrine centered upon the veneration of Bava Gor and related black African Muslim saints (Basu 2004a: 63). The fact that they hailed from diverse eastern African ethnicities magnifies the importance of ritual devotion to Bava Gor for the formation of a cohesive community defined in this context as a Muslim “caste” (*jamat*) of African origin (Alpers 2000: 91–92). Sidi leaders’ characterization of this devotional relationship as the bond between a *kul* and its *kuldevta* not only reflects the tradition’s alignment with the religio-cultural paradigms of its environment, but also takes on new meaning: the ancestral aspect of this bond expands to include the common denominator of African heritage linking the saints with their devotees in a dynamic conceived as an ancestor–descendant relationship.

With Bava Gor’s tomb providing a center of gravity for the growing Sidi community in the early nineteenth century, Mai Misra’s tomb only a few paces away was likely included in this process of magnetization. The statements mentioned above introduced Bava Gor, Bava Habash, and Mai Misra as the triad of sibling-saints widely venerated by the Sidis of Gujarat. They explicitly positioned Bava Gor as a lineage deity whom Sidis have worshipped for generations through various rituals. Likewise, a private ritual tradition honoring Mai Misra suggests the history of Sidi women’s devotional relationships with this female African Sufi ancestor-saint (Graves 2018). The tradition highlights the concept of natural kinship with the ancestor-saints coloring the *kuldevta-kul* dynamic in the Sidi context. One iteration of this ritual, a pre-wedding ceremony performed for Sidi brides in Ahmedabad, illustrates Mai Misra’s veneration in terms of a lineage goddess (*kuldevi*). The material culture of Mai Misra’s veneration in this particular ritual, and during Mai Misra’s death anniversary celebrations (*‘urs*) in general, demonstrates the Sidi Sufi tradition’s enrooting in the religious culture of Hindu goddess worship in Gujarat.

Sidi devotional songs provide glimpses into the characterization of Mai Misra in terms of a goddess. One devotional song (*git*) performed by Sidi women in Ratanpur identifies the ocean as her abode: “Mai Sahib Mother of Ratanpur who lives in the ocean. *Mai Sahib Mari Ratanpurwali samudariye men rehnewali*.”⁴ Another devotional song (*jikar*) performed in Ahmedabad invokes Mai Misra by epithets linking her to the sea and ocean: “Oh Sea Mother, Ocean Mother / Oh Water-Pot Mother, Oh Veil Mother. *O Dariyewali re Mama, Samandarwali re Mama / O Kalaswali re Mama, Chundariwali re Mama*.”⁵ These two songs associate Mai Misra with oceans and seas, indicating that she dwells within them. The *jikar* also identifies Mai Misra with her water-pot (*kalas*) and veil (*chundari*), items which feature ubiquitously in death-anniversary (*‘urs*) rituals honoring her.

Mai Misra’s identification with the sea places her within the domain of Hindu goddesses who, like her titles “Mai” and “Mama,” are also called “mother” (*Ma/Mata*) and may be associated with the sea, such as the goddess Vahanvati Shikotar Ma propitiated by Gujarati seafarers, or with rivers like the Sarasvati and Ganges (Chandervaker 1963; White 2003: 32). Likewise, Mai Misra’s association with a water-pot and veil reflects a popular aspect of the material culture

of Hindu goddess veneration. The nine-day Navratri festival features the ritual installation of a jar-form of the “Great Goddess” Durga (Rodrigues 2003: 39). This jar embodiment of the goddess involves a clay or metal water-pot called a *ghat* or *kalas* that is filled with water to represent the fertile womb of the goddess as cosmic creatrix (Narayanan 2018: 291; Rodrigues 2003: 262). The *ghat* is topped with a coconut and may be covered in a red cloth, or even a sari and jewelry in some locations (Shukla-Bhatt 2015: 93). The wide-bellied jar that is clothed, garlanded and bedecked with jewelry resembles a pregnant woman adorned in her bridal attire (Rodrigues 2003: 262). The epithets identifying Mai Misra by her water-pot and veil gesture towards this ritual jar-installation (*ghatasthapana*); this gynomorphic mode of embodying the goddess is applied in the Sidi Muslim context to aniconically represent Mai Misra during her death anniversary celebrations (Graves 2019). The method of construction and ritual installation of Mai Misra’s *kalas* closely parallel the ritual embodiment of a Hindu goddess in a jar-form (*ghatasthapana*), rendering Mai Misra’s *kalas* the primary aspect of the material culture of her veneration that reveals her conceptualization in terms of a Hindu goddess.

One of the most common modes of venerating Mai Misra is the performance of Mai Misra’s *Khichri* ceremony. This is a private ritual event in which Sidi women consume *khichri*, a porridge-like dish of lentils and rice (Basu 1998: 94–95; 2008: 250–253; Graves 2018). The ritual often fulfils a vow (*mannat*) that a supplicant makes to Mai Misra to sponsor a *khichri* ceremony in exchange for healing or a boon. Sidi families generally host Mai Misra’s *khichri* ceremony on behalf of a daughter prior to her wedding; some traditions require that the ceremony



Figure 24.1 Mai Misra’s *kalas* in Bhavnagar shrine. Image by Jazmin Graves.

be performed after the bride's arrival at her husband's home, as well. The bridal *khichri* ceremony evidences the ritual's associations with female fertility. Mai Misra's temperament in her origin narrative, where she delivers the innocent from the cruel designs of a sorceress, suggests an equilibrium of hot (aggressive) and cool (nurturing) qualities, rendering the saint paradigmatic of South Asian cultural ideals of femininity (Basu 1998: 90–91; 2000: 256–257). These thermodynamics apply to the saints' charisma or energetic potency (*barkat*) and procreative potential: thus, the balanced Mai Misra is invoked to cool an overheated female reproductive system, while Bava Habash, a hot-tempered saint, is invoked to stoke an overly cool male reproductive system (Basu 1998: 90–92, 94–95). In the former case, the consumption of the consecrated dish of *khichri* transfers Mai Misra's equilibrium to the female consumer, bringing the latter's procreative resources into homeostasis.

Mai Misra's *Khichri* ceremony evokes certain aspects of Hindu goddess mythology and devotional practice in its structure and association with fertility, respectively. In her origin narrative, Mai Misra sets sail for India with her adopted sisters and female friends (*sahelis*) (Basu 2008: 234–235). Her *sahelis* traditionally number seven, though their names vary widely between interlocutors and seem almost haphazardly applied in some cases. Seven Sidi women representing Mai Misra's *sahelis* are thus the first to consume the dish of *khichri* during the ceremony. This motif of the auspicious female heptad finds expression in goddess worship throughout western India (Basu 1998: 94). The popular Gujarati goddess Khodiyar Ma, an apotheosized woman venerated as a *kuldevi* both historically and contemporarily by various clans and castes, is generally worshipped as foremost in a cohort of seven that includes her six sisters (Shukla-Bhatt 2014). The lineage goddesses of Rajput kinship groups in Rajasthan are likewise grouped with six goddesses; while the names of these companion goddesses may vary, the collective of seven is a consistent motif (Harlan 1992: 82). This convention reflects the survival of ancient *saptamatrika* ("seven mothers") traditions centering upon seven goddesses considered emanations of the potency (*sakti*) of the Great Goddess (Foulston and Abbott 2009: 110). The appearance of this motif in the context of Mai Misra's origin narrative and the structure of her *khichri* ritual both demonstrate the enrooting of her veneration in the religious culture of goddess worship in western India, as well as her conceptualization in terms of a *kuldevi*.

Seven Sidi women representing Mai Misra's *sahelis* dress the dish of *khichri* with ample amounts of ghee, and occasionally sugar in some locations; some may serve the *khichri* with small side dishes of plain curd. In Ahmedabad, for example, devotees may perform the *Shakkarwali* ("Sugared") *Khichri* ceremony in honor of Mai Misra's *saheli* Itarewali Ma ("Mother from Itara," a village in Jamnagar, Gujarat) (Graves 2018). Mai Misra's cool-minded "sister" saints are generally remembered as being addicted to sugar, an association which links sweetness of taste with coolness of temperament (Basu 2000: 251–252). Dairy products like ghee and curd also evoke mother's milk, accentuating the *khichri*'s cooling effect on the female reproductive system. After the *sahelis* have cleared the dish of *khichri*, other women may consume any leftover *khichri* as consecrated food (*niyaz*) (Basu 1998: 95). As the seven women symbolically embody Mai Misra's sister-saints, who in turn reflect the goddess heptad motif, the distribution of the leftover *khichri* as consecrated food reflects the distribution of food (*prasad*) that has been offered to a deity in Hindu devotional contexts.

The sweetness of the tray of *khichri*, to which sugar has been added, and the ritual's relationship with female fertility, together suggest a conceptual overlap with one Navratri tradition associated with the goddess Vahanvati Ma. Gujarati Hindu women in Ahmedabad report that during Navratri, one tray of unsalted, sweet vegetarian dishes may be offered to Vahanvati Ma from each household headed by the male relatives in a family. The central tray in the spread is

called the *khand* (“piece; part”), the others *akhand* (“unbroken; the whole”). A raffle is taken of names of married women in the family who have not yet borne children; the woman whose name is called must eat the entire central tray of food. She is expected to bring her new baby with her the following Navratri. This parallel suggests the adherence of the ideological framework for Mai Misra’s *khichri* ritual to the cultural paradigms of the region.⁶

While the heptad of *sahelis* in the *khichri* ceremony reflects the seven-goddess cohort associated with *kuldevi* worship in Gujarat and Rajasthan, notions of ritual kinship with Muslim ancestor-saints govern Sidi women’s embodiment of Mai Misra’s seven *sahelis* during the ceremony. One of the criteria for selecting the seven *sahelis* for the ritual is that the women should be “true Sidi” – that is, they should have curly hair (Basu 2008: 251). Dark skin and curly hair evidence natural kinship with the ancestor-saints and phenotypically mark inheritance of the saints’ spiritual power (Basu 2000: 248–249, 2004b: 238). Sidi women in Ahmedabad and Ratanpur reflect that theirs is the hair of their ancestor-saints Mai Misra and Hazrat Bilal, the Abyssinian companion of the Prophet. Their hair is indicative of their membership in the Sidi caste (Kaur 2020: 187; Basu 2000: 249). This natural transference of spiritual power is the prerequisite for ritual kinship with the ancestor-saints, a relationship of devotional service mediated through initiation by which the neophyte becomes a ritual son or daughter (*balka/balki*) of the teacher (*murshid*), and of the ancestor-saint of whom the teacher is likewise a ritual son or daughter (Basu 2000: 248–251). This initiation process contributed to the development of the Sidi community around the shrine of Bava Gor in the nineteenth century (Basu 2004a: 63).

The initiation of ritual daughters (*balki*) of Mai Misra is reflected during one sequence of the Misra’s ‘*urs*’ celebrated by Shidis (Afro-Pakistanis) in Karachi, in which seven women initiates of Mai Misra consume the *khichri* in seclusion near the saint’s shrine (Basu 2000: 260). These initiates parallel Mai Misra’s seven *sahelis* in the *khichri* ceremonies of Gujarat and Mumbai, suggesting that this tradition preserves a history of Sidi women’s initiation into a ritual lineage (*silsila*) at whose head is the Rifai Sufi saint Mai Misra (Graves 2018). Mai Misra’s *khichri* tradition may therefore provide a window onto Afro-descendant women’s integration into the Sidi community coalescing at the tombs of Bava Gor and Mai Misra in Gujarat. This tradition also reveals that the conceptualization of Mai Misra oscillates between her identity as a Rifai Sufi saint classified as a *kulpir* or lineage saint of the Sidi community, and her veneration via material media and motifs usually reserved for a Hindu goddess.

The *Kalaswali Khichri* and the aniconic embodiment of Mai Misra

Sidi brides in Ahmedabad may observe the *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony before their wedding. This *khichri* ceremony features the installation of Mai Misra’s *kalas* which, enrobed in Mai Misra’s *chundari*, garlanded with flowers and olfactorily serenaded with incense sticks, occupies a special seat overseeing the assembly. Through its incorporation of the *kalas*, this particular *khichri* ceremony best demonstrates the grounding of Mai Misra’s veneration in the religious culture of goddess worship in Gujarat. The lead ritual specialist of Ahmedabad’s Sidi community identifies the *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony as a *sthapana* (installation), and the woman who assembles the *kalas* describes the installation as “seating” Mai Misra in the assembly. The term *sthapana* connotes Hindu ritual contexts involving the installation of an image of a deity. For example, the family of a Hindu bride may invite a priest to perform a *Ganesh Sthapana* to initiate the corpus of pre-wedding rituals. The *sthapana* involves the installation of an image of the god Ganesh in the home, an act described as “seating” (Hindi, *bithana*, to seat) the deity. As a pre-wedding *sthapana* performed by Muslim Sidi women, the *Kalaswali Khichri* involves an



Figure 24.2 "Rifai Initiation Lineage of 'His Holiness' Mubarak Baba Gor Nubi," photographed in the home of a high-ranking Sidi Rifai Sufi in Gujarat. Image by Jazmin Graves.

installation the *kalas* as an aniconic material medium suggestive of the saint Mai Misra in this Islamic devotional context.

The installation of the *kalas* as a symbolic embodiment of Mai Misra during the *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony suggests Mai Misra's conceptualization in terms of a lineage goddess. Prior to a son's wedding, some Hindu families in Ahmedabad perform *Mataji ni Sthapana* (Gujarati, "Installation of the Mother [Goddess]"), installing an image of the *kuldevi* worshipped within the family's patriline along with a jar-form of the goddess called a *matki* or *ghado* (Hindi, *ghat*; Sanskrit, *ghata*) in Gujarati. The *ghatasthapana* conveys the goddess' generative potential as cosmic creatrix and fertile earth by assembling a gynomorphic image of her, emphasizing her womb, from component parts that evoke her manifestations in nature as earth and riverine goddesses (Rodrigues 2003: 86, 158, 262). Accordingly, "the symbols and prayers that accompanied the *ghata* rituals aimed to induce fertility" (Rodrigues 2003: 138). The jar installation's direct association with female fertility reveals the importance of the Gujarati Hindu groom's pre-wedding *Mataji ni Sthapana*. The event symbolically embodies the family's lineage goddess in her jar-form to induce the fertility of the bride about to enter the household. The inclusion of the *kalas* in the Sidi *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony thus amplifies the ceremony's intended influence on the fertility of the bride on whose behalf it is performed.

The symbolic embodiment of Mai Misra in the form of a *kalas* that is seated before the assembly of women participating in the *Kalaswali Khichri* parallels the installation of a *kuldevi* in her jar-form during a Hindu groom's pre-wedding rituals. The embodiment of either sacralized feminine entity in a jar-form reveals an equivalency between the concept of lineage saint (*kulpir*) and lineage goddess (*kuldevi*) in the context of Mai Misra's veneration. Ahmedabad's lead ritual specialist notes that the way in which Sidis construct the *kalas* in Saurashtra or peninsular Gujarat and Kutch in northwest Gujarat resembles Hindu *ghat* traditions. This observation indicates reflexivity regarding the rootedness of Sidi ritual practice in the religio-cultural landscape of Gujarat.

The *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony features an additional element suggestive of the devotional culture of Hindu goddess worship in Gujarat. After the participants have eaten the *khichri*, they sing devotional songs (*jikar*) accompanied with percussion instruments, performing *dhammal*. The Sidi *dhammal* performance, especially during the ancestor-saints' 'urs, consists of a seated (*baithi*) segment that culminates in a standing (*khari*) ecstatic dance sequence (Shroff 2013: 22). In the standing sequence, participants step rhythmically as the group traces a counterclockwise circle around a central space; other participants may "play" in the center of the circle ("play" being the verb strictly used, instead of "dance," to describe participating in *dhammal*). Participants almost always perform seated *dhammal* during the *khichri* ceremony. Yet during the *Kalaswali Khichri*, the seated *dhammal* performance graduates to the standing sequence. This standard *dhammal* sequence incorporates a new element in this ritual context: the *kalas*. The bride hoists the *kalas* atop her head as she leads the counterclockwise procession of other women and girls playing *dhammal*.

The *dhammal* ecstatic dance invokes the Islamic heritage of the Sidi devotional tradition. Ahmedabad's lead ritual specialist explains that its counterclockwise rotation intentionally enacts pilgrims' circling the Ka'ba during *hajj*. She associates Sidi *dhammal* with the dance of the Abyssinians (Habshis) praising the Prophet as recorded in one *hadith*. She explains that Bava Habash ("Father [from] Ethiopia") brought this tradition with him to India, and that playing *dhammal* is central to Sidis' expression of their unique identity ("We circle around playing *dhammal* for the sake of our identity. *Hamari pehchan ke liye ham chakkar lagate dhammal khelke*"). Sidi *dhammal* is a performance of Sidis' heritage, bequeathed by Abyssinian Muslim ancestor-saints, as a Muslim community of eastern African ancestry.

Nevertheless, one Sidi community leader draws a parallel between Sidi *dhammal* and the *garba* dance Hindus perform in honor of the goddess during Navratri in Gujarat (Shroff 2005a;

2005b). A perforated clay pot called a *garbo* is placed at the center of a counterclockwise rotating circle of dancing women, who may also carry such pots atop their heads as they dance (Shukla-Bhatt 2015: 92–94). Containing a lit lamp whose flame casts star-like shapes through the pot’s perforations, the *garbo* represents the universe as the cosmic womb of the goddess: the name of this pot and its associated genre of song and dance derives from the Sanskrit noun *garbha* meaning womb. Its symbolism is thus akin to that of the *ghat*. Both the *garbo* clay pot and the clay or metal *ghat* represent the goddess’ generative potential and feature in the material culture of the Navratri festival in Gujarat. The incorporation of the *kalas* into the standing *dhammal* sequence of the *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony reinforces this parallel between the Hindu *garba* dance honoring the goddess and *dhammal* performed in veneration of Mai Misra – who is symbolically embodied as a goddess would be – during the *Kalaswali Khichri*. That Ratanpur Sidi women perform a *garba* song replacing the goddess name “Ambe Ma” with “Mai Sahib Ma,” a title for Mai Misra, accentuates these observations of the enrooting of Mai Misra’s veneration in the religious culture of goddess worship in Gujarat.

Conclusions

Mai Misra’s *kalas* is a distinctive element of the material culture of the Sidi Sufi tradition which features ubiquitously in her death-anniversary observances in Gujarat and Mumbai. The *Kalaswali Khichri* ceremony of a Sidi bride in Ahmedabad best demonstrates the rootedness of Mai Misra’s veneration in the religious culture of Hindu goddess worship in western India. It recalls the jar-installation that some Hindu families in Gujarat may perform in honor of a groom’s lineage goddess, demonstrating an equivalency between Mai Misra’s status as a lineage saint (*kulpir*) and veneration in terms of a lineage goddess (*kuldevi*). The incorporation of the *kalas* in the standing *dhammal* segment of the ceremony evokes the *garbo* pot of the Gujarati *garba* dance performed in worship of the Hindu goddess Durga during Navratri.

The *Kalaswali Khichri* ritual underscores Mai Misra’s representation in terms of a goddess in Sidi devotional songs, and her association with seven *sahelis* suggestive of the goddess heptad motif that appears in the worship of the goddess Khodiyar Ma in Gujarat in western India and Rajput lineage goddesses of Rajasthan in northwestern India. The material culture of Mai Misra’s veneration thus evidences the enrooting of the Sidi Sufi tradition in the religious culture of western India and recalls a history of Afro-descendant women’s integration into the Sidi community through bonds of ritual kinship with the African Sufi saint Mai Misra entombed in Gujarat.

This chapter surveys the material culture and structure of Sidi devotional rituals as they illuminate Mai Misra’s multivalent identity as a Sufi saint venerated in terms of a Hindu goddess. Its analysis of the multivocality of the *kalas* and of the image of the saint it embodies participates in the academic discourse on the textual, material and ritual products of Hindu–Muslim cultural exchange in South Asia, especially in the context of Sufism in India. The chapter’s study of the Sidi Sufi devotional tradition of western India contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the African diaspora in South Asia.

Notes

- 1 According to a conversation with the caretaker of Mai Misra’s Ratanpur tomb in April 2019, Mai Misra was engaged, but her fiancé was martyred before their marriage, precluding the birth of any children.
- 2 The statement does not name the South Indian state Karnataka, home to Hindu, Christian and Muslim Sidis who have relatively less exposure to the devotional tradition of Gujarat’s Muslim Sidis

- (Obeng 2004; 2007). The Sidi Sufi tradition of Gujarat appears to have spread to Sidis in Karnataka by the twenty-first century, approximately two decades after the composition of these statements. See Catlin-Jairazbhoy (2004: 203, n. 16). Sofia Péquignot observes the role of social media in facilitating connections between Sidis in India (Péquignot 2020).
- 3 The *jikars* comprise the most sacred genre of Sidi devotional song. Other devotional song genres of the Sidi Sufi tradition include *qawwali*, Mai Misra's *garba* songs, and songs simply classified as *git* (Hindi, "song, praise song"). For more on *qawwali* at Bava Gor's shrine, see Basu (2003: 240, 242) and Shroff (2004: 166–167). Shroff depicts the performance of *qawwali* at Bava Gor's shrine in her 2005 documentary, *Voices of the Sidis: The Tradition of Fakirs*.
 - 4 Narrated by a daughter of the Sidi community's lead ritual musician of Ratanpur and transcribed by the author in October 2019.
 - 5 Accessed at the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology in Gurgaon, Haryana on June 12, 2017. From the Nazir Ali and Amy Catlin Jairazbhoy Collection, 1:387:05. This song is performed by Rumanaben Myava at approximately 0:40:07–0:40:27.
 - 6 See Graves (2018: 5–6) for a general overview of parallels between Mai Misra's *Khichri* ritual and a type of *zar* ceremony performed by Muslim women in Sudan. At the same time, the components of Mai Misra's *Khichri* also align with those of a devotional ritual performed by Shia women in Hyderabad, the *dastarkhan* (see Diane D'Souza (2004: 196–197)). These overlaps point to common elements of Muslim women's devotional practices in distinct settings in the Indian Ocean world.

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GLOSSARY

- ‘alam* standard or banner used for commemorative processions
- ‘alim*, *‘alima*, *‘ulama* religious scholar (male, female, plural) in Islam
- ‘ashura* the tenth day of the Muslim Month of Muharram on which Imam Husayn was martyred at the battle of Karbala, Iraq, in the year 680
- ‘ashurakhana* / *‘āshūrkhānah* “House of the tenth”; a form of Shi‘i religious architecture found in the Deccan region of south-central India; see also *imambargha/imambara*
- ‘auliya* / *avliya* / *‘awliya (allah)* saints, see also *wali*
- adab* physical comportment, etiquette, good Islamic manners
- adhan* the call to prayer
- ahl al-bayt* “people of the house” of the Prophet Muhammad; the members of the Prophet Muhammad’s family descended through his daughter Fatimah al-Zahra
- arkan al-Islam* the pillars of Islam
- avatars* reincarnations
- baraka/barakat/barkat* divine benison that manifests itself in health, wealth, and good luck. Barakat is bestowed by God and emanates from pilgrimage places, venerated religious figures, or objects.
- bid’a* innovation
- da’wa* / *dakwah* summons, or “call,” to Islam
- dargah* the tomb-shrine of a saint
- dhikr* / *ziker* remembrance of God
- Eid al-Fitri* the holiday at the end of the fasting month, Ramadan
- fatwa* a non-binding legal opinion, issued by an jurisconsult (*mufti*)
- fiqh* Islamic jurisprudence, understood as the human effort to interpret Islam’s sacred law on the basis of selected sources, including the Koran and the Hadith
- hadith* sayings and traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad or the Shi‘i Imams
- hajj* Ar. Islamic obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca
- halal* permissible according to Islamic law
- Han Kitab* classical Chinese Islamic texts largely composed in late-imperial times and inspired by a synthesis of Islam and Confucian principles. The word “Han” captures their Chinese language, while the term “ketabu” transliterates the Arabic world work “book,” i.e. “kitab.”

- ijtihad* lit. “exerting oneself,” technical term for the process of independent legal reasoning on the basis of reason and the principles of Islamic jurisprudence
- imam* religious leader
- imambargha/ inambara* building used for Shi’i *majalis* in North India and Pakistan
- jihad* “effort” in the religious path
- madrasa* an educational institution or “school,” traditionally employed to indicate Islamic religious schools and seminaries
- majlis*, pl. *majalis* “session,” a Shi’i mourning gathering to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and other members of the *ahl al-bayt*
- masjid* Mosque
- mawlid/mawlid/maulid* celebration of Prophet’s birthday or panegyric text of the telling the story of the Prophet’s nativity. Also, commemoration of a saint/*wali*
- mazar* shrine
- muezzin* person appointed to call the congregation to prayer
- mufti* Islamic jurisconsult
- Muharram* first month of the Islamic calendar
- muhtasib* a jurist assigned to inspect and regulate markets
- mujtahid* a senior jurist who is qualified to practice *ijtihad*
- panja/panjah* a hand-palm shaped amulet
- pir* literally, elder. In Sufism, a *pir* is a spiritual leader. In traditional Central Asian craftsmanship, the term is used for the patron saint of the profession. The English translation is no exact equivalent, however, because strictly speaking, Islam does not acknowledge saints but speaks of “friends of God” instead.
- qibla* direction of Muslim prayer
- sayyid* title used by the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad
- shari’a* Islam’s sacred law
- shaykh* master
- silsila* chain of descent (genealogical and/or spiritual)
- tauhid* unicity of God
- tawassul* ritual of prayer and petition that is often part of pilgrimage
- umma* religious community of Muslims
- ‘umra* the lesser pilgrimage to holy sites in Saudi Arabia.
- ‘urs* a celebration to commemorate a dead Sufi saint
- wali* Friend of God, i.e., saints
- wali songo/sanga* the nine saints who spread Islamic ideology and practice in Indonesia, often adapting local customs and arts to fit Muslim practice and ideas
- waqf*, pl. *awqaf* religious endowment, usually of land
- zakat* the annual tax or payment that faithful Muslims are obliged to pay based on their income and property
- ziarah / ziyara* pilgrimage or pious visitation, usually to saintly graves

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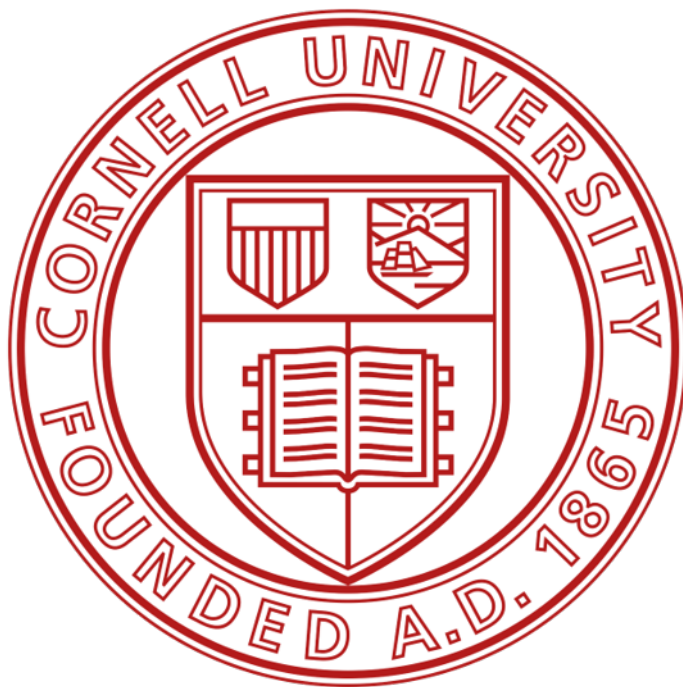
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